ANNUAL BLUEWATER CRUISING ISSUE

PassageMaker®

The Trawler & Ocean Motorboat Magazine

LIVEABLE AND OCEAN CAPABLE KROGEN 52

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EGRET'S TRAVELS: A LOOK BACK

SELENE 42 EURO DECK

JULY/AUGUST 2012
$5.99US $7.99CAN
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Display until August 13, 2012

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Voyage of *Egret*: Reflections

Story And Photography By Scott And Mary Flanders

As Mary and I reflect back on Nordhavn 46 *Egret's* travels, it is quite remarkable she ended up circling the globe. Circumnavigating was never our intent, and for years, it was never even discussed. In fact, shortly before leaving New Zealand, we were still looking at traveling north through the islands to Japan, to the Aleutians, and Alaska. In the end, we chose to head west to Tasmania.

We recently consolidated travel photographs of *Egret* to three separate external hard drives. Our photographs are our memories even more so than written words. Mary and I can look at one of many thousands of photographs we've saved over the years, and it will still feel like the experience happened yesterday. We hope to bring a few snapshots of our travels to life and make each one so delicious you will want to do it too. Think of each tale as a reflection: the top is Egret and the bottom is you. Of course none of us can exactly duplicate another's experience because everyone sees through different eyes, but we will give you a head start on your own personal voyage of discovery.

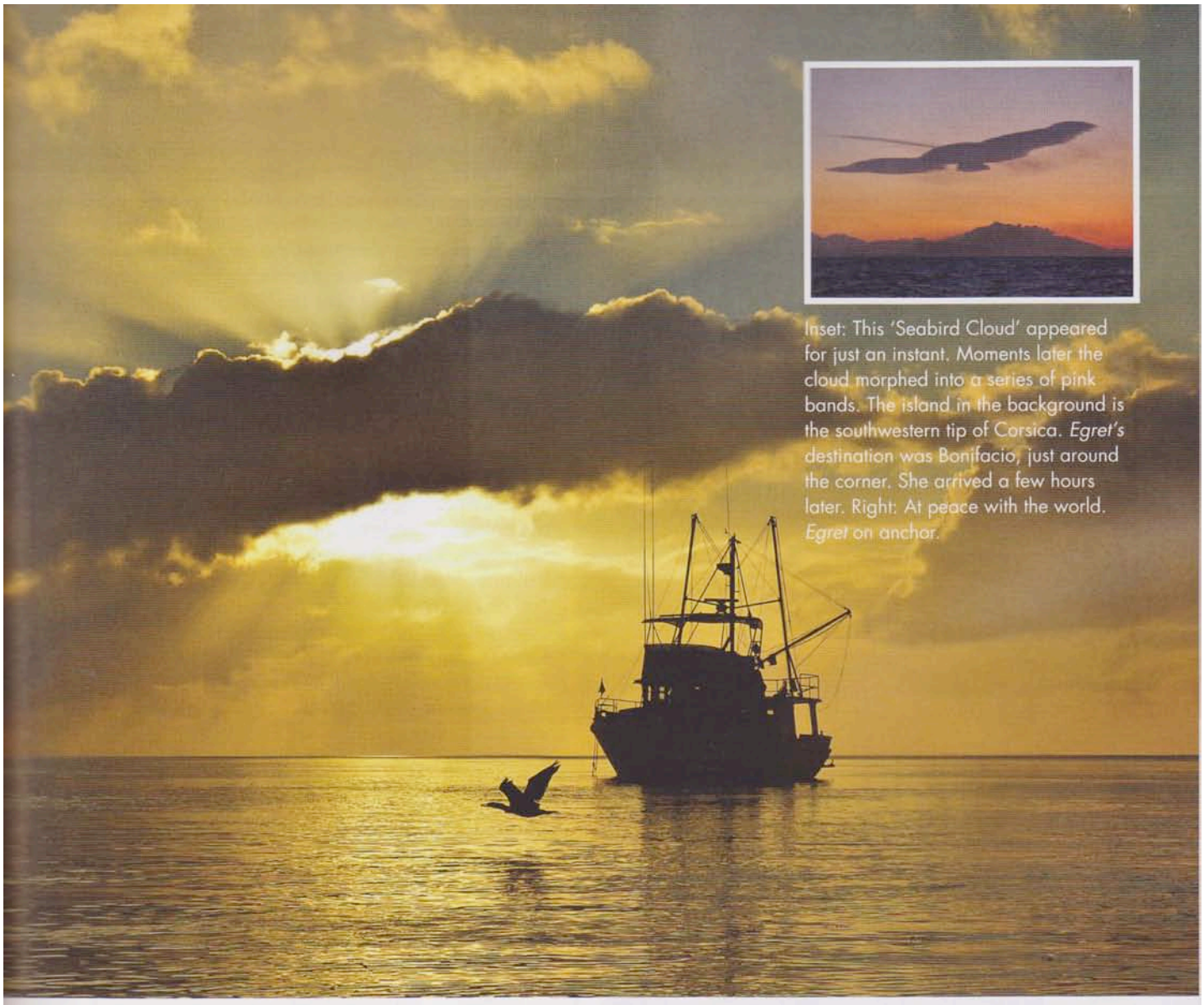
Before we lead you down this path of temptation it is important to understand you can do the same if you choose. We are just plain folks, like you. No smarter or braver. Mary was a pediatric physical therapist and I was in the wholesale boat parts business. Neither of us had ever been to sea before, other than an occasional Florida to Bahamas crossing of 55nm. Mary and I started with baby steps and lengthened our stride as time passed, just as thousands of others have done, both power and sail.

The Italian island of Ponza is 60nm southwest of Rome and offshore of Naples. We've been there three times and would love to go back. Ponza is a mountainous north-south island, 4nm top to bottom and quite narrow in some places. The main anchorage named the Inferno (for its white flame-like rocks set in a reddish-brown background) is located on the southeast corner of the island.

The bottom of the Inferno anchorage is filled with white sand between 18 and 30 feet deep with excellent holding. It is rare during summer for the wind to swing from the usual westerly quadrant sea breezes to an easterly quadrant.

There are two tales to tell—the second prompted by the first. *Egret* has a small tender, a 9-foot aluminum bottom rib with a 3hp Yamadog 2-stroke engine. We find the smaller tender easier to use in the med because there is little dinghy exploring and it is easier than a larger tender. From the first trips, we knew Ponza was riddled with sea level caves as well as land tunnels dug by the Romans. On a bright summer day, we set off heading south in the dink, around the bottom then north up the west coast to see what was whipping. First up were the Roman baths and a tunnel leading to the other side of the island. We did this before and didn't have a flashlight to make the long passage under the hill so we kept going around the southern tip of the island, explored a few small caves then entered Cala Chiaia Di Luna (Moon Cove).

At the south end was a rocky beach with a home-built structure of sorts and a tunnel carved into the hill beyond. The cove is faced with high, sheer cliffs and interesting rock formations. The beach shack turned out to be a restaurant with a few tables outside. A long black extension cord ran through the tunnel to the refrigerator and a water pipe was next to the cord. The owner, and sole

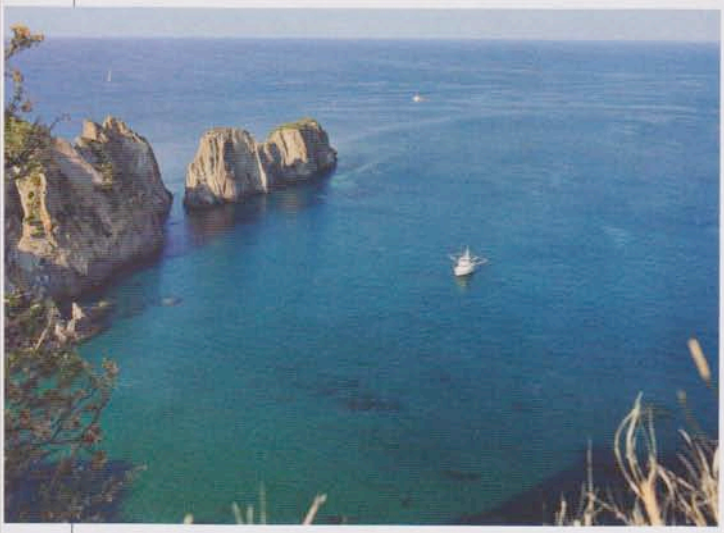


Inset: This 'Seabird Cloud' appeared for just an instant. Moments later the cloud morphed into a series of pink bands. The island in the background is the southwestern tip of Corsica. *Egret's* destination was Bonifacio, just around the corner. She arrived a few hours later. Right: At peace with the world. *Egret* on anchor.

person around, quickly put on a shirt and welcomed us in very broken English. The words, "icy cold beer" is understood around the world so he went straight to the fridge and returned with the suds. Soon, a dinghy arrived from a tiny sailboat anchored offshore with an Italian fellow in a swimsuit and no shoes. He spoke English well and asked if we wanted lunch. The restaurateur brought out what he had on a tray—it was a pasta dish with sea critters of some type. We said OK and then he left. Bathing suit boy set the table and out came great hunks of fresh Italian bread, a salad, and the ubiquitous bottle of red. While all this was going on, an American girl living on the island showed up and joined the group. She told us the history of the island: the Romans dug the cave, and the semicircular beach was their bathing beach, etc. With the pasta dish served, the conversation flowed, the wine bottle passed between the tables until it was empty, and then another bottle appeared. And so, the afternoon went.

We came back a couple days later with *Egret* and anchored in the cove. Bathing suit boy's wife and daughter were coming that day and we wanted to meet them. We picked them up in the dinghy and ferried them to *Egret* for brunch. Their eyes went wide when they saw *Egret's* beautiful interior compared to their ancient 26-foot day sailor. The couple owns a restaurant near the Coliseum in Rome and they invited us to visit them one day, so that they could show us the "real Rome." Unfortunately this didn't come to pass, but it would have been a wonderful opportunity.

We moved *Egret* back to the Inferno anchorage and decided to circumnavigate Ponza using the 9-foot dink and 3hp engine (we also have an 8hp for the dink but chose the 3hp for its simplicity and light weight). Of course we didn't look at a chart and calculate the distance but at least we had the foresight to add a 5-liter jerry jug (about 1.4 gallons) in addition to a full tank (built into the engine). We started off exploring where we left off on the other side of Cala Luna. The first deep cave (100 or more feet) had a chimney illuminating the inside of the tunnel in the prettiest blues and greens you can imagine. The next cave was so deep we needed a



Top: Circumnavigating Ponza in *Egret's* dink wasn't all hard work. Mary takes a break while Scott snoozed in the shade. Middle: *Egret* anchored in one of Ponza's many anchorages. In the cliffs below where the photo was taken, are windows set in the cliff face. The entire top of the cliff has rooms and hallways dug by the Romans. Can you imagine your boat anchored here? We hope you enjoy the anchorage as *Egret* did. Below: Mary seated at the beach ristorante in Ponza, off the coast of southern Italy. If you look closely you will see the interior is a cave with a simple block wall closing the cave entrance.

flashlight to get to the end. The winding route opened into a several story cathedral that was blacker than black. Mary turned off the light and there was no sense of up, down or any other direction. It was silent except for a slight wave noise from the surge at the entrance.

The long day was spent exploring virtually every opening we could squeeze the dink into, including a couple openings where we had to tip the dink on its side to enter a narrow entrance that opened into another cave. Nearing the end of the day, we were a little nervous about running out of fuel, but we made it back home with a bit to spare. Next up: The Mediterranean.

Describing the Mediterranean could take a very long time, but we'll roll a few rocks into your garden. Speaking of rocks, Gibraltar comes to mind—the Balearic Islands off the coast of Spain, in downtown Barcelona. There, you can see the memorial where Columbus landed after his first voyage of discovery. You can also see Corsica, where *Egret* anchored in exactly the same spot described by Homer in *The Iliad/The Odyssey*; Elba, the home of Napoleon's first exile; Sardinia, Rome, Ponza and a couple other Italian islands; Sicily, Malta, Greek mainland, and the wonderful Aegean Greek islands, Turkey and Crete. It is a sight to see, and everyone should see it, but of course this is just the beginning.

World cruising destinations are divided into roughly six months on and six months off for comfortable seasonal cruising. In some locations including the Med, those rough guides can be stretched. However, ocean crossing timing should not be stretched. Jimmie Cornell's *World Cruising Routes* is a must-have publication for long-distance cruisers that defines virtually any ocean or long distance coastal route timing. If you follow the rules for any ocean crossing timing there will be good days, and a few not so good days, but overall it will be a pleasant experience with very little chance of extreme weather. For example, if you choose to cross to the Med from the U.S. East Coast, a May–June crossing is the norm.

An alternative to crossing is shipping a well-built coastal cruiser as well as a capable passagemaker. Once in the Med during the summer cruising season there is little chance of bad weather. If bad weather does come early in the season (April), or during a stretched season (October) the forecasting is excellent and boats stay put until things settle.

French Polynesia is pretty special. Bora Bora, an overnighter northwest of Tahiti is very memorable, particularly on July 14th, Bastille Day (French Independence Day). *Egret* happened to be in Bora Bora on that special day. After a number of anchorages inside the barrier reef including dinner at Bloody Mary's (a must), *Egret* anchored off the village of Vaitape for the festivities. There were parades and events presented for locals, and not tourists. In fact, we saw very few tourists

besides cruisers. About half of the population were spectators while the rest were participants.

At the beginning of the event, there were speeches given that only a dutiful few attended and then the parades started culminating with the banana bearer's race. The parades were led by vehicles covered in so many flowers and so much garland that you literally could not tell if the vehicles were cars or trucks. The participants and spectators all wore flowers and garlands as well. The banana bearer's race began in a sand pit where 8-foot poles were laid out with stalks of green bananas tied to the ends. Each pole had to weigh at least 80 pounds apiece. The contestants had to pick up the poles on a dead run, throw them to their shoulder and run a course up and down the street in front to the start-finish line. The winner was a fit young man with Polynesian tattoos who the locals and cruisers cheered for. It was a very special day. The experience was unforgettable!

Left: A mother and daughter in the Bora Bora parade. Which is happier or more beautiful? The correct answer is both.
Right: A participant in Bora Bora's banana bearer's race. This photo is for the Admirals.

Coastal cruisers can be shipped to and from Tahiti. Once there, the weather during the cruising season is nominal for the most part. Tahiti is rarely hit with tropical storms, so leaving a cruising boat in Tahiti for a couple of cruising seasons isn't uncommon. However, coastal cruisers as well as marginal passagemakers should be shipped in both directions to and from Tahiti to avoid having to attempt the 1100nm run from Tonga to New Zealand at the end of the cruising season.

A Pacific crossing is an April–May event with cruisers usually leaving from the southwest of the U.S. coast, Mexico, or Panama. The first landfall is typically the Marquesas followed by the Tuamotus, Tahiti and so on. This is a typical trade wind route for southeast trades, and during a normal year the weather is quite benign with occasional short-lived fronts.

Tonga is the eastern most island chain of the big three western Pacific island groups: Tonga, Fiji, and Vanuatu. The northern most island in Tonga is Niuatoputapu (also known as New Potatoes). There were a number of memories from Niuatoputapu: a local charity event at a meeting house with kids singing, skits, and kava drinking (kava will set you free mis amigos); a climbing tour into the mountains; a Tongan feast put on for the cruisers by locals; a fishing trip where four locals went fishing on *Egret* and caught two large mahi mahi and a pair of fat yellowfin tuna; dinner at a local resort where resort owner Laura emptied her freezer to feed a large yachtie crowd.

There is one simple incident that stands out and is so typical of remote island life. Mary was back aboard while I dinghied ashore, ready to walk to town. I was approached by a local who pointed out that a nearby house was his. I was waiting to see what he wanted after the small talk. Finally, he asked if I had a single fishhook. Then, he asked if I had a large hook. I said yes to both questions. I told him he should go to the dinghy behind the boat when I returned to it so I could give him the hooks. He was thrilled. Back aboard I saw him going into an ancient dugout canoe. There were three large papaya lying in the floor of the dugout. He gave them to us and I handed him a bag of perhaps 40 hooks of different sizes and gave him a spool of line from an old reel. He was literally speechless with tears in his eyes. He paddled off without saying a word and went to the reef to fish. It started raining. He kept fishing.

This is what we westerners don't see in our day-to-day lives. New Potatoes is a small island with around 1,200 folks living a subsistence life. The only business is government. There are a few small shops with very little except staples. During our time we didn't see a single person in the shops. They have no money unless they work for the government or go off the island during the picking season in New Zealand and pick fruit under a migrant worker program. We did see some ladies making

This very special photograph was taken in the Chilean Channels. What made this photograph so special was not necessarily it's beauty but the rarity of this scene. Nearly every day of the year this glacier-dug fjord is choked with ice from a 3-mile wide glacier at its head that calves ice winter and summer. *Egret* was anchored nearby when a strong northerly blew through at night clearing the way for an ice free run to the glacier head. Most of our sailboat first cousins don't have the fuel to make this trip and over the years not more than a handfull of powerboats have made the journey north, much less try and negotiate this fjord. It was magic. In fact, it was a magical three days before the ice returned and *Egret* headed north once again.

fiber mats for sale where they send them off to larger islands on the local supply boat. If they want to eat they have to grow it, pick it off a tree, dig it from the ground or catch it off the reef. There are a few treasured pigs on the island but no sheep, goats or cattle. A fishhook is a big deal because they simply don't have money and no one sells hooks.

The Niuatoputapu folks can speak English and are happy, clean, and a pleasure to be around. It is quite an experience to see a culture so different than ours. You need to experience this while places like Niuatoputapu still exist. Niuatoputapu is one of many destinations to choose from during the westbound migration across the Pacific to the popular wintering spots of New Zealand or Australia. The usual South Pacific cruising season is between May and mid-October.

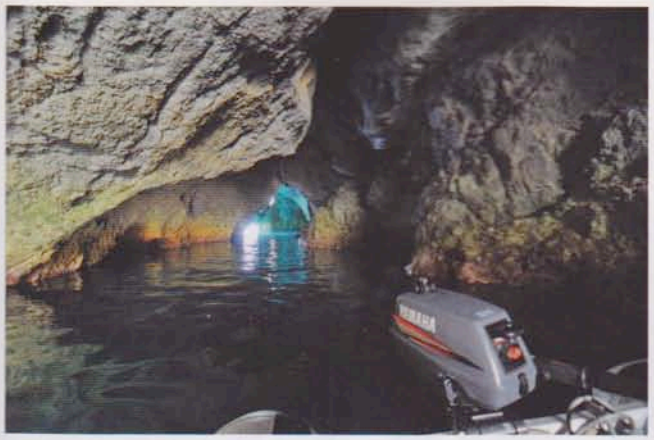
For those of you that eat dessert first, this is for you: the best of the best. If Mary and I had to choose the absolute highlight of *Egret's* travels it would have to be the seven weeks *Egret* spent on her winter cruise in southern Chile hopping from one unforgettable anchorage to another. Most folks visiting this wild place in the world trade oceans after a few months of local cruising. *Egret* spent 15 months enjoying this wild, rugged wonderland.

High winter in the Southern Hemisphere is July and August. July and August have occasional fierce weather but more stable days than summer because during winter the lows move south toward Antarctica. We were never as cold during the winter as we would be a few miles inland because it is a maritime climate and even if the surface water had a thin coating of ice, the water just below the ice would be much warmer. There wasn't a moment that *Egret's* reverse cycle air conditioner did not pump heat while using the A/Cs to help load the generator during battery charging.

Another advantage to winter cruising is the frozen ground, which makes hiking much easier on the environment. During the magical seven weeks, Mary and I hiked high into the mountains. On a few occasions, we could look down on the condors flying below.

One day, *Egret* was anchored in Estero Coloani, just off the Beagle Channel in the southwestern part of Chile. After a couple days of wild weather, it calmed, the ice moved out, and we went dinghy exploring. Off to the west is a low peninsula about a half-mile long. We landed there and crossed the peninsula at a narrow point and came to a low delta formed by black glacial silt from the glacier between two mountains to the west. The delta had no vegetation but there were some shallow narrow streams that ran across it. Beaver dams blocked a few of these streams. We pulled two sticks from the dams to use as hiking sticks as we wound our way through the delta toward the glacier face. After following one flowing stream to the face, we saw an ice cave. It was tricky entering the cave because the sand footing was barely 1 foot wide—we used the stick as a prop to help us get in. The cave had a chimney to the sky that illuminated the ice in every color imagineable.

While anchored in Caleta Olla, about 15nm from Estero Coloane, we made a second trip to a secret double waterfall. Caleta Olla is the usual first stop on the 75nm 'glacier loop' along the Beagle Channel. There are nine glaciers within the first 6nm along the loop. One glacier appeared exactly as the one described in Charles Darwin's book *Beagle* (which was also the name of Darwin's ship). Caleta Olla is at the east end and is a U-shaped cove with an entrance off the Beagle.



Left: One of the many caves we explored in *Egret's* dinghy. This particular cave not only had a chimney to the sky but a narrow exit at the end. Right: A traditional fisherman in Niuatoputapu, Kingdom of Tonga, who asked for a hook. He arrived with three large papaya as a gift. He received more than a hook and left with glassy eyes.

a low hill rising to the south, marshlands to the west, and a high sheer cliff to the north with a series of down sloping ledges that go to the bottom. Our personal drama unfolded along these ledges.

After visiting the secret double waterfall, Mary said we should take this route to the top of the cliff. I disagreed, but in the end, I told her to lead the way and I would follow. So up we went. And more up—lotsa up we went! I would like to say we made it to the top like British cruising buddies did during the summer but we didn't. We were stuck. Big time stuck. So we decided to come down the ledges that, from above, looked doable. It was not easy. Part of the way down we had to drop to the next ledge and we knew if we had to go back up it would not be easy or even possible. This was really dumb. So down we went and in the end, we made it to the flat below the cliff. Mary lost her good sunglasses that were tucked into the windbreaker she had strapped to her backpack. She lost the windbreaker too. It was a a memorable day, but a bit expensive.

There is an easy way to visit Patagonia without penalty and that is down the west coast of South America. The first stop south of refueling in Ecuador is Callao, the port for Lima, Peru. It used to be difficult for a cruising boat to stop but these days the yacht club in Callao welcomes visitors, gives them two weeks for free, and deals with the paperwork. This is priceless and gives you time to visit Machu Picchu and rest for the next leg to Arica, the northern most port in Chile. Arica is close to the Atacama Desert, the second driest area on earth (Antarctica's McMurdo Dry Valley is the driest). This is a fascinating area where Chile, Peru and Bolivia meet. From Arica south down the Chilean coast there are a number of harbors but ultimately you end up at Puerto Montt at the top of the Chilean Channels.

Egret did not arrive in Chile via the west coast of South America. Instead, she came down the east coast. The weather was reasonable for the most part, until we reached the Argentine coast. Things changed along the Argentine coast. If *Egret* ever returns to Patagonia we will use the west coast route going and coming. A foreign boat gets 18 months in Chile, so there is no problem with the boat, but as a person you only get 90 days. Once in Puerto Montt, the northern terminus of the Chilean Channels, it is a simple half-day bus ride through the mountains to Argentina for a visa run and you have a fresh 90 days to make it south to Ushuaia, Argentina. This is what Mary and I did on the trip north.

We saved the easiest for last and recommended this trip many times to not only North Americans but foreign cruisers as well. This cruising area's northern boundary is Nova Scotia and the southern is the Bahamas. The U.S. east coast, Nova Scotia, and the Bahamas are great for cruising and all have interesting destinations with a lot of diversity. During *Egret's* travels we found this area the easiest for cruising, and the least expensive if you stay out of marinas, and it is something you may enjoy for many, many years. *Egret* enjoyed this area for two years learning how to become competent cruisers spending two winters in the Bahamas and one summer in Nova Scotia before she left on the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally for the Mediterranean. *Egret* returned to Nova Scotia last August from Europe and cruised south to Florida. *Egret* will revisit the Bahamas in April and May (2012) and will be in Nova Scotia when this issue of *PMM* hits the newsstand. Exciting, isn't it? Wait until next year.

These few words and photographs are a brief look into *Egret's* life during the past years. You can't possibly imagine what else she has seen and done. As always, our goal is to help you choose cruising as a venue to freedom and adventure, and to enjoy yourselves on the water wherever you choose to travel on your own personal voyage of discovery. Good luck to you. Well, actually, you make your own luck. Ciao.