

The Voyager's Handbook

Preface

When I agreed to do this revision three years ago, I vastly underestimated the task I had set for myself. I knew that the book was in need of updating, that things had changed since we had started cruising in 1992. But I hadn't considered just how much they had changed. Looking back on it, I would say that offshore boats and equipment changed more in the last decade than they had in the hundred years prior, from the time Slocum took his *Spray* and sailed her around the world alone.

It wasn't just that the boats got larger, though average length has increased ten feet since we ended our first voyage in 1995. But the range of boat types out cruising expanded exponentially as well. The 30- to 35-foot heavy displacement traditional cruisers that typified offshore boats through the 1970s have been joined by lighter, more modern designs, and in the past few years multihulls have made big inroads into the cruising fleet. New low-stretch, high-strength materials for sails and lines facilitated the increase in boat size as did new sail handling techniques adapted from the short-handed round-the-world racers. Satellite technology revolutionized communications and navigation aboard, while the Internet and cash machines greatly simplified managing life from abroad. Improvements in just about every aspect of technology from watermakers and refrigeration to solar panels and batteries made it possible for long-distance voyagers to bring along most shoreside comforts. Mass marketing of these new technologies brought the costs for all these comforts and conveniences within reach of the moderately well-to-do cruiser. From sail handling to communications, from sail materials to navigation, much of what we have aboard our 47-foot sloop, *Hawk*, did not exist or was prohibitively expensive a bit over a decade ago when we outfitted our Shannon 37 ketch, *Silk*.

All of this means that the cruising community has become much more diverse. In any harbor in the world where cruising boats congregate, 1970s traditional cruisers equipped with little more than a GPS and a depth sounder lie at anchor next to multihulls and modern performance cruisers carrying watermakers, generators, refrigeration, washer/dryers, and air conditioning. This incredible diversity of boats proves there is no single right way to go cruising, but that each crew must find a balance between luxury and simplicity that reflects their priorities as well as their budgets. To be useful, the revised book needed to address the needs and concerns of crews at either end of this spectrum.

I hadn't really considered all of this when I sat down and started to write. For the first few months, I approached each chapter believing that this one would require some simple editing, just a little bit of revision. Instead, I ended up rewriting almost every word in the first two sections of the book and adding three new chapters. While I was able to keep a substantial

amount of the material in the second half of the book, much of it got reorganized to make it more useful, and I added another four chapters of new material on subjects ranging from dealing with business and bureaucracy from the boat to managing heavy weather at sea. The revision ended up taking me two and a half years.

In the process, I tried to remain true to the original vision of the book: What does an experienced coastal sailor need to know to make offshore passages and live aboard in foreign lands for a period of several years? These pages contain everything I wish I had known when we first set sail. I hope they will help you to cast off the docklines and begin a new life.