



SKIP NOVAK

TAKING A YACHT TO THE FALKLAND ISLANDS, WHERE MARINE FACILITIES ARE PRIMITIVE, IS TRULY A FRONTIER EXPERIENCE, SAYS SKIP

On returning from the Antarctic Peninsula at the end of March, my skipper on *Pelagic Australis* reported with no exclamation mark that there were seven cruising boats in Port Stanley, our base of operations.

He didn't have to elaborate as I got what he meant. There is hardly enough safe dockage in Port Stanley for three or four yachts. There is no marina as such.

As a remote and exotic safe haven location, Port Stanley probably ranks down there with the most primitive. It is a tough place to hang in to.

The narrow harbour is a four-mile reach aligned dead east/west. With an average wind speed over the islands of a bracing 17 knots and continuous frontal weather passing through – coming mostly from the westerly quadrant – it can be an untenable situation. That is especially so if you are at anchor in front of the town, or caught out on the wrong side of the very few rough and ready jetties that can be utilised by small craft. You have to be ready to rock and roll. And if you have precious topsides, I suggest you stay well clear.

'ENDLESS STRUGGLES ARE PART OF THE FRONTIER EXPERIENCE'

The choices to tie in to are somewhat unique. Working from the eastern extremity going west, you have FIPASS, which stands for Falkland Interim

Port and Storage System, a floating amalgam of six enormous barges lashed together and left over from the 1982 conflict with Argentina.

Apparently this structure is long past any chance of a clean bill of health survey and has never been dry docked. It is kept afloat by patching up and pumping out.

This is the main terminal for ships to bunker, offload and resupply. Warehousing is available and the port captain's office is a container perched on barge No.1.

Yachts can use the eastern butt end of a ro-ro pontoon to gain some shelter but the drawbacks are soon obvious due to continuous barge maintenance: grim showers of rust and shot blast grit that, in a westerly, peppers rig, sails and the deck.

The favoured alternative is at the Falkland Islands Company East Jetty on the foreshore of the town. The FIC

recently re-structured the eastern end, which is much appreciated. Another is the new public jetty, which we sometimes use in calm conditions. But this is intended and prioritised for the tenders offloading tourists from the many cruise ships that now visit the town and we are warned that the pontoons and structure supporting them are not to be trusted for supporting any tonnage.

Actually, things have gone backwards from the early days as the government jetty, which was further along the foreshore to the west, was a great spot either on the end or tucked behind an 'L' that gave the best protection for small craft under about 60ft, albeit those with lifting keels. That was sadly condemned 15 years ago and broken up, and no replacement is forthcoming.

The government has bigger fish to fry, namely the fishing fleet, both local and foreign-going, that is licensed in the Falklands Maritime Zone and is the biggest earner for island government.

Then there's the nascent oil and gas industry. Enthusiasm and infrastructure building waxes and wanes with the price of crude, while the locals are always anticipating the boom, à la the Shetlands. Currently the oilmen are taking a rain check.

And tour ships bring in a £15 per passenger landing tax plus their spending on tours, cream teas and knick-knacks – and they come in the many thousands annually.

So yacht traffic is therefore small beer. Frequently, plans are mooted for a redevelopment of the foreshore with a proper yacht marina being fundamental.

We regulars are often asked to comment on the plans and put our two cents' worth into the design. Alas, we are often also disappointed when nothing seems to materialise. And so it goes.

But is it so bad? I have never been a fan of marina environments. They can take over as a life of their own and, in a way, cut you off from the port and its people if all services and conveniences are laid on.

We continually complain about the lack of facilities in Port Stanley and there is no doubt that if the marina does materialise it will be most welcome.

But it will also be closure to the endless struggles that we accept as part and parcel of what can be considered a frontier experience.

Having thought about this, long may it remain so. ■