

## Sunny Spray's travels, episode 9

*March 12, 2016, 20°22'NB; 18°54'WL, 344 nautical miles north of Dakar, Senegal*

*Sent March 17-18, 2016, from Dakar*

Dear all,

The previous episode of Sunny Spray's travels dated from February 6, and ended in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Since then a lot has happened: we also visited La Gomera (an "island too far") and El Hierro ("the end of the world" and a real gem, combining all features from the other islands). And since Tuesday March 8 we are on our way to Dakar, Senegal. We are experiencing a lot of wind, and as a consequence quite high waves (approx 3-4 meters), but fortunately the wind is coming from the right angle, 130° over port. We are making good progress, have laid in a lot of reefs, and are trying to keep velocity at 5 knots; not more, since we needed to make an emergency repair to our main sail on only the second day out, and we are trying to arrive with the emergency repair in one piece.



What happened was entirely our own fault: the sling holding up the entire sail plus battens package was in too low a position from the start of this trip. In order to hoist the sling up, you first have to hoist the sail all the way to the top of the mast, shaking out all the reefs. While doing this during a relatively quiet moment we did not notice that the reefed battens + sail bundle dipped below the sea railing, on which was attached a steel case holding a navigation light. The bundle got snagged below the navigation light, while the electric winch was pulling up the gaff and the sail. Something had to give, so the sail tore out of the two gaff endings, and also suffered a vertical rip.

If this happens to a 'normal' sail, you can lower it, detach it from the boom and get it inside for an emergency repair or gluing with sailcloth repair tape.

With a junk sail, however, you would need to remove all 8 battens, piece by piece, before being able to handle the sailcloth. A giga-job, and not one to be performed at sea. What one CAN do, however, is take the damaged section out of the loop, or bypass it. We did this by attaching the first batten below the gaff with pieces of rope to the gaff, creating a "bag" of the damaged sailcloth. By reducing speed we reduce force on the sail surface, so that, hopefully, we arrive with enough material left over in the "bag" to make a proper repair in Dakar. Unfortunately, it looks like the lowest batten has been broken as well, but we'll only be able to see that once in port.



On the topic of sailing, we have to admit that sailing between the islands was quite challenging. This is caused by the so called 'acceleration zones'. Apart from Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, all other Canary islands are quite high (1500 m average) to very high (Tenerife, 3800 m plus on mount Teide). The already strong northerly wind is being pushed into the channels between the islands, giving rise to a so-called Venturi-effect. A Venturi effect is a sudden acceleration of air particles, resulting in the sudden onset of very strong winds. In wind speed terms, one will at least experience 10 knots wind speed more than predicted, more likely 20 knots extra wind, while several sailors report wind increases of even 30 knots! These effects are not purely local but can still be felt dozens of sea miles away! We were in an acceleration zone for more than 60 miles when leaving El Hierro!

Despite this annoying phenomenon, we have managed to visit all islands but one (La Palma, which we visited extensively in 1983 with our previous boat, *Fint*). Also, it was a bit too northwesterly with respect to our southward route.

We do not regret a single day of our lengthy stay on the Canary Islands. In comparison to our earlier trip in the 80s, we now have more financial means and are able to rent a car when needed, which resulted in us having done and seen a lot. Hence the following report.



*Speaking about sails: various friends asked us for a picture of the painted sail on Golden Wind (see episode 8). I had not made a picture myself, but found one in one of the books Jo writes and illustrates himself. Thus, I took the following picture of a picture of Golden Wind's second sail. See also: [www.der-spurlose-pfad.de](http://www.der-spurlose-pfad.de)*

On February 6 I finished episode 8 of Sunny Spray's travels, and the next day, the 7<sup>th</sup>, we made our last outing on Tenerife. We took the bus (*guagua*) to the Piramides of Guimar, an ethnographic park, about 60 km away (but it took the bus 2 hours per single trip). It being a Sunday, everything was closed (not even a bar open for some coffee), apart from the park. It had better be good.

The park is an initiative of Thor Heyerdahl, a Norwegian scientist and adventurer, who died on Tenerife in 2002, and was realized as a private project by the Fred Olsen Line (a Canary Island based Norwegian company with long established roots in the shipping and ferry business). The Park opened in 2015. Heyerdahl was an archeologist and anthropologist, who, since the late forties of the last century, wanted to prove that contacts between ancient civilizations had been much more intense and farther

reaching than hitherto thought, and that these contacts came about by long sea expeditions, carried out using rafts or boats made from balsa wood or (papyrus) reeds.



*Two real figure-heads that used to adorn ferries from the Fred Olsen line. They depict the history of the islands: left a Spanish conquistador (conqueror), right a Guanche-warrior (Guanches are the original inhabitants of the islands).*

*By the way: on all islands the original people are called Guanches, only on El Hierro they name themselves Bimbaches. Has anyone any clue why??*

Heyerdahl found support for his theories in similarities between the building of pyramids in the Middle East, North Africa and South America; in similar styles and methods used to make pottery; in paintings and sculptures, and in anthropology. And most of all in the results of sea-going expeditions, which he carried out himself with co-workers or friends: he crossed the Pacific on the balsa-wood raft *Kon Tiki* and won an Oscar for the documentary about that adventure; he crossed the Atlantic Ocean on a boat built of papyrus reeds (*Ra I*, built in Africa, did not make it and sank; *Ra II*, built by Indians of Lake Titicaca who nowadays still built boats and rafts of reeds, did make it); and he crossed the triangle formed by the Persian Gulf, Northwestern coast of India and East Africa using a boat made of reeds, the *Tigris*. He also focused worldwide attention on the Marquesas Islands, the Galapagos islands and the sad story of the inhabitants of Easter Island (Rapa Nui).

The evidence underpinning his theories are convincingly exhibited and explained in the Park. It is really nice that they do not forget to mention alternative explanations for some of the evidence, so that the visitor can make up his/her own mind what to believe. They exhibit a near-size copy of *Ra II* (only one meter shorter), scale-models of all rafts and boats used by Thor Heyerdahl, the world's largest comparative exhibition of pyramids, and many objets d'art and artifacts he collected during nearly 50 years of work and travels.

It was decided to build the Park in Guimar, since that town was known to house remains of several stone step pyramids. The Park, in fact, is built around the pyramids, so that you can view them at leisure from

all sides and can also enjoy local flora and fauna (including explanations as to what the plants were used for). Did anyone know that sisal rope is made from an everyday agave plant? (We did not!).

In the surrounding garden we also found the perfect animal of the month, but since we only had a camera with a dead battery, we could not take its picture. But it led to another story and visit, and you'll read more about that later on.

All in all it was a pricey and lengthy visit, but we enjoyed it hugely and thought it was well worth the trip. Because of the dead battery only a few pictures, but you'll find more on [www.piramidesdeguimar.es](http://www.piramidesdeguimar.es).



*Heyerdahl thinks this tableau underscores his theory of early contacts between far off civilisations: white skinned, fair-haired visitor to be sacrificed by South American Indians.*

*Others depict fair-haired men with beards (the American Indians are beardless). Until today you can find fair-haired Berber populations.*

In the evening of the same day we had to officially obtain ship's clearance for leaving the Canary islands (not possible to obtain that in either La Gomera or El Hierro). To our big surprise the customs man passed by the boat and handed us the documentation personally! What a service! That concluded our stay on Tenerife, we said goodbye to Frank and Rita, and Yves and Joanna. Ready to go!

Monday February 8 we left Santa Cruz de Tenerife, once more motoring because there was insufficient wind. On our way we had great fun with dozens of dolphins playing around the boat. All of a sudden the sea became white and hundreds of fins appeared cleaving through the waves. We were in the midst of the largest group of dolphins ever seen by us!

Following a stop-over in Port St. Miguel (a bleak marina next to a golf course) we decided to take advantage of a weather window promising calm winds, and motor over to La Gomera on full power. Halfway we were suddenly hit by 20 knots wind: we were experiencing acceleration zone winds! Not reducing speed we raced on to San Sebastian, La Gomera's capital and safe port. The marina was well occupied, but still charming.



*Hundreds of dolphins on Tenerife's south side.*

*Question: does anyone knows what it means when they turn on their backs and slap the surface three times with their tail? It looks like a greeting, but that is maybe anthropomorphic thinking?*

Next morning the marina's office was open and we received a warm welcome, including congratulations for our timing, it happened to be carnival week! We had just left the carnival in Tenerife, and although they are very proud of their carnival (second only to Rio de Janeiro, they claim!!), we had found it a rather pathetic affair, with many men dressed as women and shabby costumes (but honesty forces me to admit that we had missed the big parade on Tuesday evening, .... maybe that would have changed our opinion). The carnival in San Sebastian was noteworthy for the enormous amount of noise they managed to make: Friday, Saturday and Sunday night discotheque on the village square until 5 am. The square was not even 50 meters from the marina. We were not the only ones walking around with a headache and bleary eyes.



However, Saturday afternoon's street parade was very nice. Nearly everyone had made a great effort, and the costumes were 100% nicer than the ones seen in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Personally I liked best a group of elderly men and women, showing a lot of gusto and singing and dancing a lot (picture on the

left). In the evening we found out that this colourful group consisted of members of the local choir, who regaled us with Canarian folk songs for some 2 hours. Really nice.



San Sebastian, La Gomera's capital, is a nice small town with a couple of thousand inhabitants. After some days we knew exactly which shops were where, and which ones were lacking. Specialist shops there were none. Other sailing folk had recommended San Sebastian for large scale buying of ship's stores for long distances, or for extended stays away from civilisation. We thought that an excellent idea, since shopping in Santa Cruz de Tenerife had proved to be a bit difficult.

We found a large supermarket, down below in the building of the *guagua* station, and next to the fresh produce market. Sadly, the supermarket was big, but the assortment small. Even worse was the fact that every day you would find empty shelves, some of them staying empty for quite a number of days (everything had to come from Tenerife). Often the shelves were empty of staple products, such as long life milk, sugar, flour, packages wine. This supermarket was clearly used by not only long distance sailors, but also by local people living farther inland. To my eternal shame, I have to admit we contributed to empty shelves as well: when they had finally restocked their shelves with bric-packs of not-too-good wine, we emptied out the lot.

Restocking was not a quick option. If you asked could they order something special (like old cheese), this would normally take between 2-3 weeks.

On the fresh produce market the story was not much better. Yes, they had a more varied choice in fruits and vegetables than normally found in the supermarket, but most products were far from farm-fresh.

In the end we managed to fill up seven shopping trolleys with shopping done at various locations. These trolleys were all neatly delivered door-to-door: they literally delivered at the bow of the boat.

But overall, as far as stocking up was concerned, La Gomera was 'an island too far'.



*Putting away seven trolley-loads of shopping in a boat already pretty filled up: I had to empty out and repack every space, nook and cranny. I did not forget to write down where I had stored what.*



*Similar products you try to store as much as possible together in big plastic bags or containers. To prevent contamination of your stock with mealworm and other beasties, you sew tiny bags in which you put strong smelling spices: I use laurel, cloves and pepper kernels in each bag. The bags were sewn from slightly porous material; I used a cloth barbecue apron!*

All this shopping, stowing away and sewing of bags literally kept me off the streets (the weather was rainy and very windy anyway). Nevertheless we made some trips inland, although out of necessity per *guagua*: the planned rental cars were not available.

First we visited the far away side of the island, Valle Gran Rey. The trip up was beautiful, spectacular scenery. In the 80s we had anchored there in the bay. Now it was a cozy small harbor, with no facilities for mooring, and the remaining anchorage was wide open. We had a really nice day, although the three hour wait for the last *guagua* was a bit too much (there was only a bus 3x a day).



Another trip, also with the *guagua*, took us inland for a walk high up into the mountains to Los Cedros. This time we were accompanied by Rita and Frank, who had arrived from Santa Cruz de Tenerife a couple of days later than we did.

La Gomera is THE walking island of the Canary Islands. There is an extensive network of walking paths (senders), and many walks can be reached by *guagua*, and if not, you look for a spot near a trail where the bus can stop to let you off or pick you up again. The highest mountains are at a height of 1500 meters, so it is cloudy, wet, windy and extremely COLD at the top!



By the way, my foot is doing reasonably well. The break has healed properly, but the entire foot is still painful when in normal shoes, and evenings it is still swollen. Best practice is to wear my walking boots whenever I can, no pain then. Even while typing this, 150 miles North of Dakar, at sea, I am wearing my walking boots!

In fact, we had planned more walks in La Gomera, but all of a sudden the weather cleared for some days, so we packed our things and left on Monday evening, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, direction El Hierro. Frank and Rita arrived one week later. We had scheduled to arrive at 08.00 am in the morning, but the acceleration zone gave us this much wind that we already arrived four hours earlier. Since it is inadvisable to enter an unknown harbour at night, we went to the leeward side of the island and cruised around for 4 hours, until it was light enough to see where we were going. At 08.00 we found the harbor entrance reasonably calm, so we turned into the port and marina of La Restinga, Europe's most southerly point. It felt like the end of the world.



A small cozy marina, space for approximately 6 visiting yachts, including a *varadero* (wharf), lined with houses and apartments for the maybe three hundred inhabitants. A tiny supermarket, a small post office only open in the mornings between 8 and 8.30 am, no butcher, no hairdresser, no fish shop (you have to go to the fishermen for that), one pizzeria, two bars with a terrace, and a bus stop (4x daily to Pinar and Valverde, the capital city some 60 kms to the North).

We immediately arranged to get the boat hauled out of the water for cleaning and antifouling of the bottom. One week later the *varadero* boss had built up enough courage to haul us out (the travel lift had nearly flat tyres, and his air compressor could not deliver sufficient pressure). It worked, but driving us to our parking spot was a tedious and very slow affair. Anyway, we got the job done in two days, although we were not totally at ease: instead of on struts, they had put us on old oil drums, and combined with the strong winds we were shaking at night on the drums. No recipe for a quiet night's sleep!



*Twenty tons of steel boat on top of old oil drums. But it all held, what a relief!*

*Bob likes to mention that, unlike appearances, oil drums are very strong, to be compared to a thick hollow tree also being very strong. Me: but trees are not rusty!*

Of course we were not only occupied with cleaning and painting and preparing the boat for longer travels. But we had already seen so many beautiful things on the other Canary Islands, would small El Hierro be able to enthrall us?

You bet it did! The island was a big surprise, or, as Frank said (who had already spent half a year on El Hierro during a previous trip): “an island to fall in love with”.

First of all the atmosphere, which reminded us strongly of Isla Graciosa, or of the sixties and seventies of the previous century. Very relaxed. And the near absence of tourists (there are some, they stay 2-3 days, and go back to Tenerife by ferry). A few foreign residents; so few that you know them within 2 days, and they bring the added benefit that you might find a can of sauerkraut or good solid German bread in the supermarket!

In the scenic department it can compete easily with the other islands. In fact, on an island of merely 30 by 30 km square, you find all the landscapes and scenic spots you find on the other islands combined (the only exception are white sandy beaches and dunes) .

In the south you'll find wild, very dry lava fields and numerous volcanoes; in the east Fuerteventura like abandoned terraces; in the north green pastures with cows and horses and flowery meadows; in the centre a 1500 m high mountain range with dense, Gomera-like forests, and in the west, as in Gran Canaria, steep, wind-swept cliffs. Crystal clear waters, and according to divers, Europe's best diving and snorkeling sites. And to not become bored by too much nature, also some nice attractions worth a visit.



*El Golfo, running from west to east on the northerly side, and flowery meadows on northeastern fields.*



*Champion in tenaciousness: this juniper tree has grown completely twisted and nearly horizontal because of the wind, but is still very much alive. To be seen on El Hierro's wind-swept western coast.*



*Steep to, dry southern coast with perfect diving sites. On the left (Tacoron) they built pavements and sun shelters for swimmers, including paths and swimming ladders for easy access into the sea.*



*A not very well signposted walk to the top of the central mountain range (bordering El Golfo) brings one into this forest with algae covered trees.*



*The same walk as mentioned above brought us to two viewing points (miradores), both affording a 1300 m deep look into El Golfo. We saw nothing, because the (near permanent) clouds covered the rim. It was exceptionally wet, windy and cold!!*



*On El Hierro's most southwesterly point you can walk to a monument, erected to memorize the zero-meridian. This zero meridian indicated in ancient times the end of the then known world to sailors. It was used by navigators until 1883, and then replaced by the current Greenwich zero meridian. We have an affinity for zero meridians, particularly since the current one runs through our property in Pedreguer.*



*Learned about the different types of lava rocks and streams. The picture shows the ones with the sharp rocky stones; the rope like twists and turns; the channels with high sides (often later turning into tunnels or caves), and finer dust. In between tenacious green life.*

Very special is the active volcanism and volcanic background of El Hierro. The island boasts to have the most volcanoes of all islands. Its shape has been determined by volcanism as well: it started off as a more or less square island with a central mountain range, a bit like Gomera and Tenerife. But the volcanism was quite active, and the many vents and lava channels undermined the mountain's stability. Big chunks of the mountain exploded and were thrown into the sea up to three times. The most recent one, approximately 50,000 years ago, created in the north a steep-to mountain wall, sheltering a flat plain, called El Golfo. The steep mountain wall is the one with the clouds over it and the *miradores* on top (see the pictures above). They estimate that the tsunami resulting from the El Golfo creation had a height of more than 100 meters by the time it reached North America. On the southern shore something similar happened, but here the resulting plain was later filled with new lava, so that now that part of the coast is steep to. In the east the explosions left pretty bays and inlets.



*El Golfo seen from El Mirador de Peña, a creation from our well-known friend Cesar Manrique. Nearly every island has its own, specific building or monument by Manrique. This mirador, like the one in Lanzarote, had the familiar glass wall, indoor pond and rounded walls and corners. Left starts the 1000-1500 meters high wall bordering El Golfo, nearly always covered in clouds.*

El Hierro's most recent volcanic outburst lasted from July 2011 until March 2012, and took place in the sea, not even 5 km away from la Restinga (the marina and small town where we were staying). This outburst was accompanied by 3000 smaller and larger earth (sea) quakes, and twice they needed to evacuate La Restinga's population. Frank had his boat there during that period and was not allowed onto it, he needed to rent a house inland.

The nearby Centro Volcanologica houses an interesting explanation about volcanoes in general and a special exhibit about the La Restinga outburst. At the end, an underwater volcano had grown, nearly reaching the surface (its top is 25 meters below the surface). Fortunately for the population and us visitors, this volcano is being monitored continuously.



*Birth of an underwater volcano.*

*Diver filming an underwater volcano explosion. In the front you can see his air hoses.*

*Below the resulting debris that continuously bubbled upwards. The larger pieces which floated for a few minutes and then sank were collected. As of then, they were scientifically unknown, and this type of volcanic debris is now called restingolithos.*

*The sea where the volcano grew was coloured green, and must have contained poisonous gases, because thousands of dead fishes came to the surface.*

And finally, the 'Animal of the Month' !

In Guimar (Tenerife), we were sitting on a bench in the surrounding garden, eating a cheese sandwich. Suddenly, a 15 cm long, black lizard appeared from between the black basalt blocks, stopped 20 cm in front of our feet, angled his head, lifted up his right paw and looked fixedly at us. The perfect beggar!

He was happy to share our bread and cheese (we later learned they are omnivorous). What a pity I did not have any more power in my camera's battery for pictures!

But this small lizard intrigued me, so when I found out that El Hierro boasts a special lizard recuperation centre where they try to breed giant lizards we had to pay it a visit, of course!

The real giant lizard (approximately 70 cm long from head to tail) lived on a rock on the northern side of the island. It is now extinct.

However, some 50 years ago a shepherd discovered a small population of giant lizards, found to be a subspecies of the extinct ones, on the steep sea-based side of the El Golfo wall. This subspecies they are now trying to breed in the Lagartario in Guinea, adjacent to an Ecomuseum.

The breeding efforts are only partly successful, in part due to the animal's peculiar characteristics and behavior. The females can only start breeding after 5 years(!), and they breed only once a year. They lay numerous eggs in tunnels deep underground, and then abandon the eggs. Of the baby lizards that hatch, only a few will be able to find their way up to the surface. All this makes breeding them quite difficult. Nevertheless, they succeeded in having enough individuals to try to re-introduce them into their natural habitats. They chose three spots: one the original rock where the extinct lizards had been (found to be not very successful, the population suffers from attacks by birds of prey); one on the spot where the shepherd found the subspecies (is going well); and one in a spot in the south of the islands, near the lava fields (a disaster, the population has been wiped out by wild cats and rats).

The individuals we can see now in the center are very sedate and a bit flabby. Despite their docile looks, (or maybe because of?) they have become THE symbol for El Hierro, in this helped by a really nice, colourful lizard-logo designed by Cesar Manrique.

Therefore the giant lizard of El Hierro has become animal of the month. But we preferred our beggar-lizard of Guimar.



Love to you all, and *hasta la próxima!*

You can still follow us on [www.marinetraffic.com](http://www.marinetraffic.com), boat name Sunny Spray (or Sunnys Pray),

MMSI: 244780434.