

**1st Report: Lagos (Portugal) 37°03'.8N 8°39'.2W to
Ayamonte (Spain) 37°12'.7N 7°24'.5W
May 4 to 19, 2011**

After an unusually long stay in Switzerland from 18 December 2010 we finally arrived again in Lagos on March 9, 2011.



Alex had finished his treatment with good results and we were looking forward to a few weeks of work on *Silmaril* and to taking part in the social events of the Lagos Navigators. On the very first evening we attended a whiskey tasting and had great fun. Thanks to scrumptious tapas and a follow-up meal at the Chinese, we went to sleep totally sober. On Friday we received the definite positive answer from a prospective buyer of *Vingilote* and celebrated the long hoped-for occurrence. She will have her new home in Arbon at the lake Konstanz, where she had been before. On Wednesdays we took part in the organized hikes and got to know the surroundings of Lagos, its beautiful shoreline, the sandy beaches, and a few nice little villages. The masses of wild flowers that sprout out of the desiccated ground and the fields of bushes and small trees in bloom have fascinated me. Unfortunately the pictures are



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not all what I would have wanted them to be. I still want to show a few.



On the last hike from Torre back to Lagos I found a half dead beetle and suspected that it could be a specimen of the palm weevil, a real pest in Mediterranean countries. It destroys fully grown palm trees. Yes, it is one, as people confirmed. I carried it to *Silmaril* imprisoned in two shell halves, took pictures of it and killed it without the slightest qualm.



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We had seen many very old dead palm trees in Lagos and the neighboring countryside. a Swiss couple we met here, were regularly on those hikes. They had spent the winter on their boat in the Marina de Lagos. We undertook this and that with them. On a Sunday they accompanied us on *Silmaril* in a fun sailing regatta. We were second in place despite a totally botched start (no idea about the regulations, neither them nor we!) after the race was cancelled on the second leg for the excellent reason that the wind had died completely. It had been an exceedingly fun amusing day.

Bev of *Clemmy* on the same pontoon asked me to go swimming with her, her friend Helen and Alison, another neighbor from *YoHoHo*. We spent a good half hour doing lengths in the superb municipal pool and relaxed afterwards in the bathtub-warm water of a huge Jacuzzi.

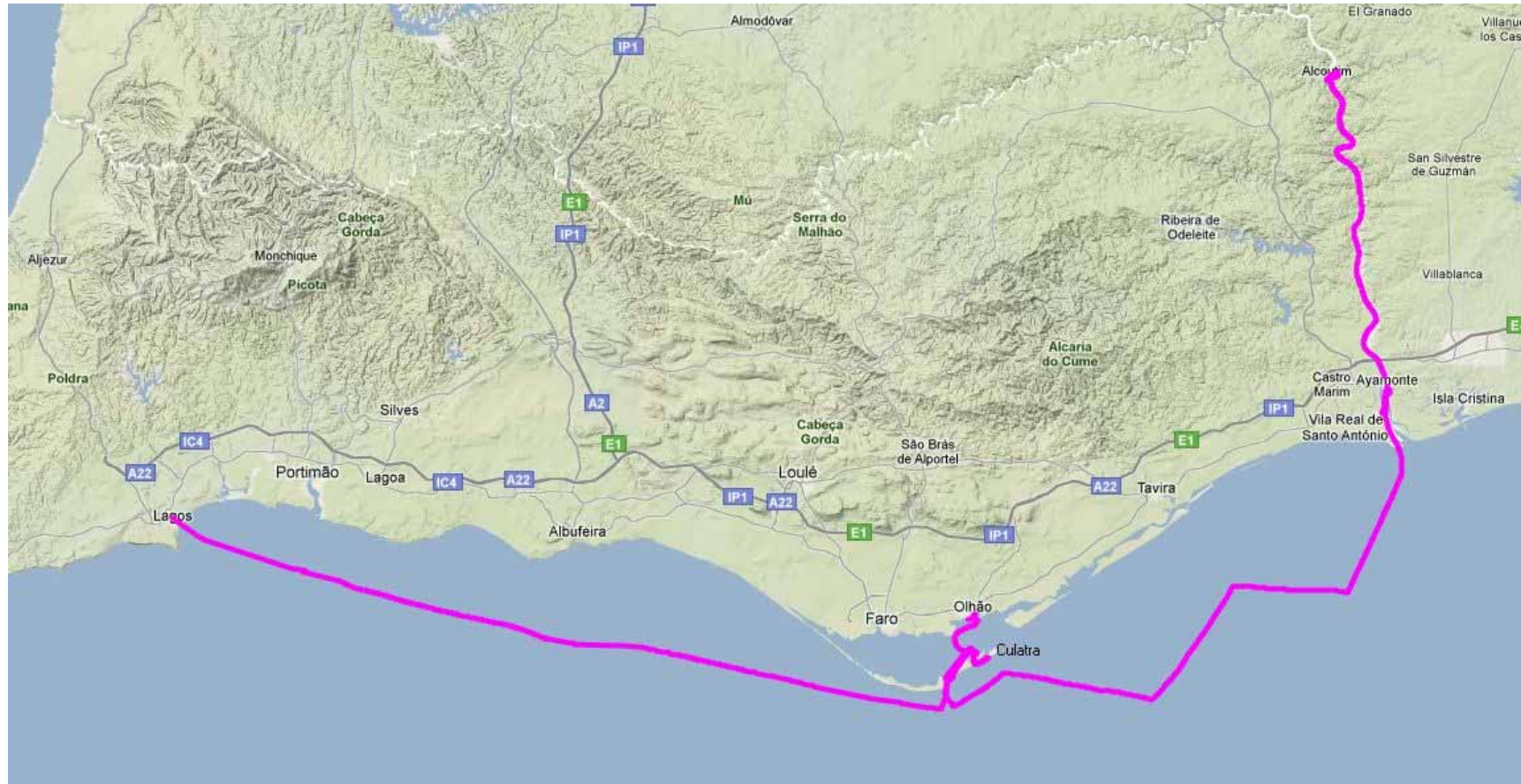
The weeks passed quickly until our flight to Switzerland on April 8. We were expected in Ehrendingen to cook for and entertain Johanna and Ronja while Sylvia and Renzo spent a few days in the South Tyrol. Shawna and Lynn were also with us occasionally. The second week we went to the lake of Murten to our little cottage and took care of some spring chores. Connie, Nino and the girls visited over Easter and helped with many of the more strenuous jobs. Friends of theirs joined us as well and the house was crammed full, but with the wonderful warm weather we had it was great fun.

Unfortunately our stay was much too short to visit friends. This time we concentrated on seeing our family.

On Wednesday after Easter, April 27, we started the two-day trip by bus and train from Stilli via Effingen, where we leave the car, -Frick-Basel-Paris-Irun-Lisbon-Tunes to Lagos. We enjoyed the trip immensely. The only difficulty arose in Paris, where we decided to take the metro to change from the Gare de l'Est to Monparnasse, since taxis get stuck in traffic jams. We each carried two bags on wheels and a backpack. We had not realized that there are no elevators in the Paris Metro. So, the innumerable stairs and long passageways in the stations became a real challenge. But laughing and cursing we managed to arrive in good spirits.

In Lagos we had still a few chores to attend to, but then the season 2011 on the water could begin.

Route Overview



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Wednesday, May 4. We say goodbye to our neighbors on pontoon F and leave around 09:30.



Bev and Alan on *Clemmy* are on the same finger, Alison and Steven on *YoHoHo* are moored across from us.



Looking back on Lagos for one more time, a truly pretty town, and we are finally on the way again.



Abeam of Portimão we set sails. Alex pleads to experiment with a butterfly and we try. However, with little wind and unfavorable wind angle for the best course we give up and set the Gennaker (German) and continue with acceptable speed.

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We sail pretty far out from the coast line, which appears as a varied band of sandy beaches, red brown cliffs and tourist agglomerations with ugly hotels and huge apartment buildings.

The entrance to the Ria Formosa near Faro is very narrow. Two long breakwaters reach far out toward the open sea. Between them the water of the large lagoon rushes in and out every six hours. We arrive a bit early; the water is still flowing out. *Silmaril* performs quite a dance on the turbulent water. But at full throttle I can steer her with no problem. After the breakwaters the wide expanse of the beautiful lagoon lies before us, on the far shore Faro and a bit further east Olhão, on our right the long island of Culatra that separates the lagoon from the open sea. We run along the northern shore of the island and drop anchor opposite the fishing village of Culatra among several other boats. The sunset inspired Alex to take a picture. The Colin Archer type boat of the American couple from San Francisco poses as an attractive foreground.



Thursday, May 5. We launched the dinghy first thing in the morning and chugged into the busy fishing harbor. What a picture! Dozens of small fishing boats are moored or pulled up on the sand.



Everywhere fishermen mend nets or prepare to go out again. We tie up the dinghy in a free spot and walk across the island toward the open sea on a wooden causeway, erected for the protection of the delicate sand dunes.

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We walk along the beach, collect shells and pebbles, take a short dip to cool off and pick up a few plastic bottles and pieces of rope, most of it stranded goods, only very little tourist muck.

The village is so gorgeous. Even the ancient houses are well tended. The "main roads" are paved with concrete slabs, the alleys

and passages between the houses are only sand.

The charming little chimneys are everywhere in the Algarve. Even here in this small fishing village people value embellishment.



After a good lunch in a small restaurant in a back street, we walk through the village to the harbor,

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the busy work place of the fishermen, go shopping in the minimercado and go back to *Silmaril*. Tomorrow we will go to Olhão. The engine battery needs distilled water badly.

Friday, May 6. At 07:45 we are already at the ferry pier and go on board the *Rio Belo* that takes us to Olhão. The town is very attractive. Two enormous identical market halls and a splendid park face the waterfront and the old section lies directly behind them. Many narrow and winding alleys and a great number of small shops create a confusing labyrinth. We are first



looking for a "drogeria" to buy the distilled water. A policeman walks ahead of us, strutting, hips moving provokingly, and opens the back door to a shop in a tiny alley with a charming smile. We can buy 5 l of distilled water and Alex carries it in his backpack for the rest of the day.

The church is open, we can visit. The building is plain, only the altar and the side chapels show baroque features: lots of gold on intricate wood carving. Pictures are not allowed. The museum near the church is closed, but the visit to the municipal museum and the walk through the alleys and lanes gave us pleasure.



And everywhere storks are nesting in the town, as in the entire Algarve, on chimneys, bell towers, roofs and even on a working crane!

At 11:00 with a crowd of other passengers we board the *Rio Belo* again and head back to Culatra. On the way we decide to continue to Farol, at the entrance to the lagoon, take a stroll through the village and take the ferry back to Culatra one hour later.



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The Ria Formosa is famous for its cultivation of mussels. During low water the "mussel gardens" emerge everywhere. They are intensely cared for.



On our return trip to Culatra and Farol innumerable individual "mussel fields" stretch from the shore way out into the lagoon and work is done at every low water.

At high water there are only sticks and a pole here and there protruding from the water. Up to the bushes and trees there will only be a wide expanse of water. The visit to Farol is a success, despite the fact that only few permanent inhabitants live there.



Many houses must be summer residences. And the tourists have not arrived yet. The village appears deserted, but still has its charm. The tiny alleyways and pretty houses impress us. The gardens are full of flowers and only rarely do we see a neglected patio. It seems that the summer houses are also well tended while they hibernate.

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And the variety of plants and flowers! There are all the subtropical plants, cactus, euphorbia, swamp plants and the most amazing wild flowers small and large.

!



I even spy a banana tree in bloom. Alex keeps taking pictures and smiles amiably.

The two light houses in the village soar into the cloudless sky. They stand quite a distance away from the actual entry to the Ria. They warn against the very shallow water along the entire coast.



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The entry itself is a truly spectacular place. Seen from the village it looks far more harmless than what we experienced at our arrival!



Back in Culatra we eat a scrumptious dish of squid once again and return to *Silmaril*. We will leave tomorrow and continue east.

Saturday, May 7. At 10:30 we weigh anchor and motor along the island toward the entrance to the Ria and out to open sea. We intend to sail a short way up the river Guadiana, the natural border between Portugal and Spain to Vila Real de San Antonio on the Portuguese side or possibly across the river to Spanish Ayamonte. We set sails right outside the break waters and enjoy the beautiful weather. We glimpse an occasional back of a dolphin, but they do not come close. The wind is picking up, blows from aft and we shorten the main sail. After three hours of 20 to 25 knots and the very uncomfortable waves from behind we finally reach the shallow mouth of the river. Fortunately we arrive at mid tide and do not have to worry about too little water under the keel. The breakwater protects us from the waves and happy to have arrived safely, we sail toward Ayamonte, a short way northeast of Vila Real. The entrance and the harbor itself seem very narrow from our vantage point and with the strong wind we decide to go back to Vila Real, where we can tie up alongside the visitor pontoon. Thanks to four helping hands from the port authorities the maneuver is halfway successful, since I clearly underestimated the force of the wind and the strong tidal current in the harbor. They are used to first-comers and are ready to receive every boat. The American couple from San Francisco is also here. Their *Farinda* got a bad scratch on the newly painted side. Even very experienced sailors are tricked by the current in this harbor. We were going to give them the picture of their boat at sunset in Culatra. But next morning they had already left at the change of the time when we got up. Sometime, somewhere we will meet them again and present the picture.

Sunday, May 8.

We cross over to the Spanish side of the Guadiana by ferry and visit the charming town of Ayamonte. We stroll through the alleys and plazas and by chance take part for a short while in a mass with lots of children participating with music and speeches and lots of giggles in the church with a beautiful high altar.



Then we eat lunch in front of a small restaurant on the street. The people at the neighboring table are English and have stayed over winter on their Tradewind *Fair Joanda* here in the marina for years. They suggest we move *Silmaril* here, since the town has an excellent chandler, many good stores and a harbor without tidal currents. Sure enough we meet John in

his chandlery even on Sunday. He is Dutch, his wife English and they have lived and worked in Ayamonte for years. On the spur the bimini project is born: we badly need shade over the helm and John offers custom-made tubing and a good address for a canvas worker.



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Back in Vila Real we also take a look at this place. The town was built according to the plans of the Marquês de Pombal in 1774 and is a small replica of the Baixa of Lisbon, a symmetrical arrangement of streets and plazas. This layout is still conspicuous in many places.

The town is truly charming. Only very few ugly new buildings disturb the old plan.



On *Silmaril* we mount the sun sail over the cockpit that we had brought through all the long corridors and stairs of the Paris Metro and found it much easier to put up and adapt than expected.

Monday, May 9. We move to Ayamonte. Pushing off is not successful the way we had discussed it. Wind and tidal current thwart a perfect turn in the narrow space. But with a push from Alex in the bow and a shove from me at the helm I manage to leave the harbor without a scratch. However, we are both very embarrassed. Alex is frustrated and broods for hours over a possible successful solution to the situation we experienced. He consults a series of sailors' reports on the internet.

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In the entrance to the marina in Ayamonte we again suffered an anxious moment. The tide is low and the starboard side of the entrance is silted. All of a sudden the echo sounder shows 1m70 and I clearly feel the tugging of the silt. I'm not really nervous, there are no rocks here and opening the throttle just a little and a pull to port on the helm I quickly have more water under the keel and *Silmaril* floats again unhindered. We make fast at the finger G 26 and go to the office to register.

Tuesday, May 10. Alex presents me with a solution to yesterday's botched maneuver: two possibilities would have been successful, either to wait until the tide turned and to steam into the aft line as we usually do or to put a so-called false stern line from the rear clamp on the side away from the pontoon to the bollard on the pontoon and back to the rear clamp and steam into it with feeling, while the line is gently slackened. Should try and practice that; seems to be an impeccable method in difficult situations.

Today the bimini project begins in earnest. Alex goes shopping, measures, cuts, rivets, in order to use the frame of the cockpit cover also for the bimini.

We go out to eat with Solveig and Bengt, the Swedish couple from the *Vagabond* we met in Lagos.

Wednesday to Friday, May 11 to 13. Rosana, the canvas worker, makes a pattern with packing paper to calculate the required material. She is a very amiable woman. She and her daughter Blanca (12) live in the marina on her 32 foot boat. She does the work in the boat or occasionally on the pontoon weather permitting if more space is required.

Solveig and Bengt will come for a glass o wine in the evening. They are going to leave tomorrow heading west. The bimini project is well on its way, the fabric is delivered and Rosana can start work.

Alex is working on the frame adding a few extensions to the railing to make it stabile enough to hold onto if necessary. He keeps going back and forth to the chandler, John for the parts.

We take our bikes out and cycled to Isla Canela, a resort at the Atlantic coast. The huge avenue is lined with palm trees, bushes of all sorts and red roses in full bloom. All along leads a bicycle path away from the fast traffic. The place itself is ugly, great big blocs of houses, the majority of the windows shuttered. Who might own them? Are these holiday flats belonging to foreigners or Spaniards? Or hotels that are only open in the summer season? Everywhere apartments are offered for sale. The beach is impressive; the water is at its lowest. There is sand and shallow water as far as the eye could reach. People are swimming, fishing, strolling, dogs and children run wild, a typical Saturday evening at the beach.

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I collect shells, a kind that is new to me, small open almost transparent.



Are they oyster shells that the sea has "treated" until they look like that? I will find some one some time who has the answer.

Sunday, May 15. The bimini is not ready yet. But we decide to sail up the Guadiana river to Alcoutim on the Portuguese side and come back for it later. We leave around 10:30 at about two hours after low water, so we do not have problems to pass the sand bank at the entrance to the harbor and can still profit from the up-stream current in the river. The Guadiana is very wide at its mouth, the banks are low.



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Further up north it becomes narrower, the banks are wooded and the water is the same chocolate color. It is hot.

La Belle de Cadiz passes us. She looks like a typical river cruiser. We have seen similar ones in Port on the Douro. We wonder where *La Belle* goes on her journeys.



On the Portuguese side we see pretty houses once in a while.



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On the Spanish side the few houses we spot are mostly decayed small farms.



And boats lay at anchor everywhere, some inhabited, some abandoned.



Towards 15:00 we go alongside the pontoon in Alcoutim and have a late lunch high up above the water on the second level of the village at the steep river bank in the Riverside Tavern.

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The view is fabulous. Across the river lies the Spanish village of Sanlúcar and there are dozens of boats at anchor. The food is excellent and the "vinho verde" perfect.



At the neighboring table a couple is having lunch, Germans as we understand eventually. They talk to us and we invite them to come aboard for an after-lunch drink. Anita and Holm are from East Berlin. They bring more wine and Holm fetches a quadruple shot of Medronho in a brandy glass! This is clear liquor distilled from the fruit of the strawberry tree (arbutus) and a specialty of the Algarve. Strong stuff! The two visit the Algarve regularly, adore the food, the wine, the friendly Portuguese and know many places off the tourist routes. They leave us exceedingly happy and merry.

At seven o'clock the carillon of the main church sounds its tune damdi damdi dam dam dim dim (I wrote it down, but cannot reproduce the melody here), shortly afterwards the bells of Sanlúcar toll eight o'clock!

Monday, May 16. Today we walk through Alcoutim. The village is built in several levels, has many churches and innumerable winding alleys.



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In the main church a desperately sad life-size Madonna in black velvet sheds tears. Most of the churches are locked, this one here as well, but the lovely baroque stairs make up for we might have missed in the interior.



Around midday we take the ferry to Sanlúcar and climb up to the castle ruins in the sweltering heat. The castle must have been a huge affair, not much left to see, though. But the view is astounding: the wide brown river, the many boats at anchor, Alcoutim over there and below us Sanlúcar.



Back in Alcoutim we have dinner on the central plaza, "lulas" (fried squid). They taste great, but we felt a bit nauseated the next morning. Maybe the oil had been a bit overused.

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This impressive drake hardly has the same problem! The aggressive red color and the grim shape of his head signal most clearly the state of affairs.

In the evening we enjoy the peace and quiet on *Silmaril* and watch the plumed visitors at the pontoon.

Mani Matter, a Bernese song writer, made a suitable song for the three of them: "Heidi mir wei di beidi, Heidi beidi chasch nid ha!" (difficult to translate, but here goes) "Heidi we both want you, but both of us you cannot have!").



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Tuesday, May 17. We are on our way down river. The current is against us for about one hour. Then the tide changes, the water carries us with two to three knots and we sail to Ayamonte with great speed.



Pretty farms lure me into taking more pictures. Just before the bridge that connects Portugal and Spain the old toll house comes into view. It sits on a promontory overlooking the wide expanse of the river. Quite a number of old decrepit toll houses lay along the river banks all the way up to Alcoutim and Sanlúcar.

But the closer we get to the bridge the clearer we can see on the horizon the ugly urban development of Ayamonte. No wonder the Spanish have problems with their housing situation.



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The buildings are gigantic and the foreigners reluctant to invest in new condominiums.



And in times of crisis as Spain is going through at the time it is obvious that the Spanish do not risk investment at all.

The finished houses are empty, but work still goes on in another huge project right next to them.



Toward eight o'clock we arrive at the marina and enjoy a home-made dinner.

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Wednesday, May 18. Heavy rain pelting on hatches and deck wakes us up and for a moment we don't understand what that noise is all about. Rain and strong wind continue on and off all day long. The forward hatch under the upturned dinghy is not tightly closed. And the driving rain wets our bed generously. Fortunately we still have the electric heater



on board and the mishap is easily mended. We work on a better system to organize our pictures, we read and write and wait for Rosana to come for another fitting for the bimini. Towards the evening the dark rain clouds move on and create a gorgeous evening sky.

Thursday, May 19. The morning still brings scattered showers, but the weather is noticeably improving and we go to the market. Alex wants to cook squid tonight. Rosana arrives in the evening with the finished canvas. It fits pretty well and we are satisfied with her work. She has brought a chart with the markings of the route she, her husband and their two-year old daughter Blanca have sailed in 2000 from Ayamonte to Brazil on their 32-foot boat.



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She tells us what kind of food stuff they had on board and how the whole trip had been a great success. Alex enjoyed her report immensely and I believe we just might dare the crossing despite my misgivings.

The evening is beautiful, the sky above Ayamonte displays the most fantastic light.



We will continue our voyage tomorrow and intend to sail up the river Guadalquivir to Seville. People warn us that the heat in the city is unbearable, but we believe that we will survive. Seville must be a wonderful place and we are not willing to pass it by. Read more about our trip in the second report.