



The *Meltemi* Belt – from Skyros to Chios.



Skyros Town-with it's dazzling white cube houses is the Greece of everyone's imagination. It is Cycladian in style although not part of that island group. Proud of their colourful ceramics, they also produce sandals made- to- last with soles cut from car tyres! We tied up in the tiny port of Lanaria Bay where the local ferry blasts in to the sound of "2001 A Space Odyssey" booming over the loudspeakers at every arrival.(Greek humour)! 30 minutes of chaos then peace again. Here they catch the most lobsters in Greece, delicious served with spaghetti .



From **Skyros to Chios** we enjoyed our first overnight sail of the season- 110 nm (220 km) in 20 hours, a calm, starry night with bright moonlight. Tuck refused to leave me alone "on watch". We arrived at the capital port of Chios (pop. 25.000) - just 8 km. from the Turkish coast (50 km. SW of Izmir). Chios is unlike anything else we have seen - an island off the tourist track but very unique and interesting. Almost a Turkish or Middle-Eastern feel to it. Its 20 mastihoria (mastic villages) are the only places in the world that produce mastic- so valued in the Middle Ages (and by the Turkish Sultans) that its value equalled gold and theft was punishable by death! Today it is used in chewing gum, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. The hot, dry hillsides are covered in these low, green trees and mastic appears as a teardrop-shaped resin that is harvested by hand. It is said to reduce blood-pressure and cholesterol levels and aid stomach ailments. It's jaw-breaking stuff to chew- we tried.

We took the local bus to two of the most fascinating and unique villages. The first, **Mesta**, is a labyrinth of brown stone passageways completely enclosed within massive fortified walls. The houses were built upwards, one room per storey connected by trapdoors in the ceilings to allow escape upwards from the invaders (usually Turks) and then tunnels to the centrally-located monastery for safe refuge. Today, some are converted to lovely, tiny luxury hotels. There is a lovely, bright square where we enjoyed lunch under the trees. Here they sell fresh almonds, herbs and the local ouzo – "soussa" made from figs. We liked it.



Pyrgi, at midday, is like the place time forgot. One of the most extraordinary villages in Greece. Again, a fortified village but almost every façade is decorated with elaborate and intricate grey and white designs- geometric, animals, birds, flowers and fish. It was achieved by coating the walls with a mixture of cement and black volcanic sand, then painting over this with white lime before scraping off the patterns with a fork. We were unable to find out why they did this...and why only here? Perhaps a sign of wealth- ancient one-upmanship? Tomatoes, strung up to dry in the sun, provide a splash of colour.

It's good to be reminded of just how lucky we are. There is much wealth here but for the ordinary Greek, the euro has brought greatly-increased prices and many things are simply unaffordable. The young coastguard in Lanaria tried to save us a night's harbour fees and confided (sadly) that out of his monthly salary of 990 euros, he could save only 20 e per month after he paid his rent, electricity, food and mobile phone. Originally from Athens, he was on a 5 yr. posting on this tiny island in the middle of nowhere - "only 4 years and 9 months to go" he added gloomily. 6 months sailing was totally beyond his grasp. Actually, we are still surprised ourselves sometimes. And they are so generous. This week a chiropractor refused payment for putting my shoulder right as he was a fellow sailor. They have a lovely gesture where they touch their hand to their heart with a slight bow of the head and it means ..."this comes from my heart". They've got a lot right here...



And so here we sitafter 9 days-still no sign of change, tied up in the (as often) unfinished marina which resembles an unfinished construction site/rubbish tip with no facilities **but** protection from the wind. Obviously designed by some bureaucrat, the entrance is totally unsafe in all but dead calm water when you can see through to the two rocky reefs that flank the entrance. An extremely experienced British yacht was swept onto the rocks trying to leave the other day. They finally made it out but were undoubtedly damaged. During July & August, the **Meltemi** wind blows, at gale force (up to 40 knots or 80 kph) from northern directions from 1-15 days at a time, on and off. You're stuck till it decides to drop. Friends at home imagine "gales" as us perhaps battened down under grey skies or in torrential rain. Not at all. It's still 35C, bright sunshine and cloudless skies. Perfect on land. You can do anything but sail. Out at sea, it's not to be fooled with on the wide open stretches where the winds and waves build up, as we have been warned by local fishermen, hydrofoil captains, and coastguards... We have enough time....We walk into town through the old Turkish quarter, check our emails and weather reports in the local internet café, watch the world go by with a frozen "freddocino", take the bus out to the countryside and explore, and enjoy their great Greek salads (here they add capers and green olives), or read and laze on board.....Next stop is south to **Samos, when the wind allows...Yassas....**



Tuck staying cool!