



From the Editor's Shelf

The pilot book is a mysterious object. In prehistory, the pilot was presumably a bearded cove standing at the helmsman's shoulder, mentioning that it would be a good idea to lay off five degrees to port as the whirlpool would be forming any minute now, which always put that old Kraken in a nasty frame of mind. At some point someone started to write down sailing directions. In the early days of exploration by sea these might remain confidential, as they were a handy part of a trader's armoury; but eventually they were shared among seafarers, and added to with the benefit of experience, some of it hard-earned.

Until the 1950s the best that could be done was the Admiralty Pilots. I have in front of me the *Mediterranean Pilot Vol. II* used by my late friend Barend Wolf, who sailed the Brixham trawler *Bonaventura* hither and yon in the western Mediterranean in the middle fifties. It is a charming book, and not only because of the hints of lipstick on some of the pages - the *Bonaventura's* charterers tended to be the beautiful people of the era; Barend was by no means immune, and nor were they. Like all Admiralty Pilots of its era it is a nuts-and-bolts set of sailing directions, referring to paper charts and illustrated with profiles of coastlines and harbour entrances (it is a measure of the recent explosion in Mediterranean cruising that the pilot book in use in 1955 carries an illustration of the Golfe de Fréjus executed in 1876).

The explosion of yachting since the 1960s has led to great leaps forward in the research and publishing of pilot books – to the point where in the view of some, who can be seen scowling at the screens of their phones, the whole idea of a paper pilot has become quaintly old-fashioned. Why flip through pages, they cry, when you can garner information from all over the internet? The only answer is to nod politely while the geek returns to the screen, and keep to yourself the view that the internet, while handy, is also awash with unmoderated bilge. Furthermore, researching an individual port and its approaches can involve the navigator in the kind of electronic treasure hunt that will distract the attention from that bunch of gannets hammering down. Paper, bearing authoritative sailing directions, chartlets and photographs, is better. If Tom Cunliffe or the Clyde Cruising Club are telling you how to get into an anchorage without hitting anything, you can be sure that if you do as you are told you will get in there in one piece.

The Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation is another reliable institution, and its new *Corsica and North Sardinia Pilot* (Imray, £39.50) is a cornucopia of information for people cruising those beautiful islands. It deals in splendid detail not only with harbours and anchorages, but with the special circumstances of the area. There are useful notes on visiting marine reserves – licences, mooring fees, anchoring bans and the like are both baffling to the untutored and vigorously enforced by the park authorities. Local customs, which may mean that an empty space in a marina is not as convenient as it at first appears, are also explained in some detail. It is the kind of pilot book that deserves close study well before the land rises from the sea.

For Barend, Corsica meant not getting his charter guests kidnapped by brigands; but that was seventy-five years ago. This pilot book, like all good pilot books, deals not only with the topography of coasts and seabeds, but with the world as it is now. No doubt there will be more editions in the future. For the moment, this one is all you need.

Sam Llewellyn