

## Barry De Lacy

According to the Internet, Barry De Lacy ran a casino in Birmingham. Fortunately for us, that was another De Lacy (actually a rather dead one - murdered in 2006) while OUR Barry is alive and kicking and his prize-winning partnership with Phylly recently landed the Swiss Pairs Congress B Grade gong.

That partnership started back in South Africa's East London, a coastal city somewhat to the east of London's longitude, presumably named by homesick settlers, and in Durban. Budding engineering student Barry bumped into not so budding secretarial student Phylly (she spent most of her time on the beach) and after the lady became a Registered Nurse and her swain a Diploma-carrying engineer, they married in their early 20s.

During his four-year bursary from the mammoth South African Railways, Barry helped create a huge harbour from a greenfield site. Being Africa the 'greenfield' included lakes full of crocodiles and hippos. Richards Bay became the coal exporting Gladstone of South Africa. Impressed by the De Lacy grey matter, Barry's boss persuaded him to undertake further study, so he spent four years at university, supported by the feisty Phylly, now the mother of two young daughters and working as a Registered Nurse

Emerging with a BSc.(Eng), Barry started a construction firm with his brother and a friend, specialising in roadworks and bridges. They ended up owning an aircraft company (two helicopters and three King Airs) and a road surfacing business and started doing work all over the country. Specialising in remote, difficult terrain became their forté.

Following its devastation by communist takeover, Mozambique had an ongoing civil war so his firm had to clear mines from the roads to access the area and then, with no water or electricity they had to build their own villages for their workforce. On the Zambezi, near Namibia, the Caprivi Strip is mostly game reserve these days. Driving along there one day, winding down the window to admire a vulture in a tree, Barry caught a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye: a fully grown male lion in long grass some five feet away; happily a well-fed lion. While waiting at a border post in Kasane, (Botswana borders Namibia, Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe), he felt strange vibrations through the ground, followed by a herd of fifty elephants pounding between border posts to drink in the nearby Zambezi. South Africa itself experienced a lot of violence after the end of Apartheid and Mandela's election in 1994. While working in Richards Bay one day on a new BHP smelter, Barry had to flee a huge 5000-strong riot.



One partner decided to take time out to travel and when he returned, Barry succumbed to a boyhood dream of sailing the South Sea Islands. He and Phylly hatched a cunning plan with their three children. Daughters Jacqueline and Penelope offered to help crew the boat, with Barry returning to South Africa when business decreed. Best of all, the three sailors promised to plot their course so that son Andrew's school holiday time would coincide with the yacht being near an airport. Thus Phylly, Andrew and three or four schoolmates would fly in for events such as Christmas in the Galapagos.

Dedicated fisherman Barry bought a 43 foot catamaran and they set off from Cape Town in March 2000, first stop St Helena, which we all know as Napoleon's death place. The De Lacy crew found the British protectorate fascinating and became such celebrated visitors the Mayor asked if on their trip north they could carry the official mailbag to sister island Ascension, some 1000 km away. Normal mail channels took about three months, so the plan was announced on local radio and residents brought their letters in. To make everything legally tikettyboo, Barry was officially deputised as a postman for her Majesty's Royal Mail, issued with an official canvas satchel, complete with seal.

After Ascension they headed for Brazil, crossing the mouth of the Amazon and Barry spent his 50th birthday on Devil's Island - notorious for the cruel incarceration of Alfred Dreyfus, and more recently the book *Papillon*, by Henri Charrière. Next stop was Trinidad (lots of steel bands and Rastafarians), then Marguerite, Caracas and finally school holiday fun around the Los Rocques archipelago, with 300 snorkel-friendly islands and cays.

Back on track, Shaya Moya proved herself thoroughly shipworthy, and Barry a bit of a hero, during four days of 100 kmh winds, with giant waves crashing over the catamaran. We sadly report that initially the First and Second Mates hid in their cabins with pillows over their heads. Our hero remained on deck throughout, bleary-eyed but triumphant.

Next on the list were the Dutch Antilles tax havens (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao). Then Colon, in Panama. They gamely traversed the Panama Canal alongside gigantic ships. Then while moored, handling fuel at the stern, Barry twisted and herniated two discs. Lying in agony he heard a Spaniard asking if he could look over the boat. Serendipity surfaced : the fellow was head of neurosurgery at Panama State hospital and pulled strings to have Barry ambulated to hospital and evacuated to South Africa for spinal fusion surgery.



A bumphead parrot fish

Once out of anaesthesia, the patient could be found on the 'phone to Panama, instructing the girls on caring for the Good Ship De Lacy. Three months later, Barry returned to find that in one of the most corrupt areas in the world his enterprising daughters had found work with (a) Smithsonian Institute exhibitions and (b) the local hospital.



Jacqueline and Penelope with a Galapagos local

With Phylly, Andrew and chums aboard, they spent Christmas on the Galapagos. As the cyclone season was due in the South Pacific, they journeyed down the Chilean coast to Easter Island, for a fascinating three weeks.

Next stop was Pitcairn Island, where the surname Christian is extremely popular and residents have their own dialect of English/Maori. The place was infested with rats, Barry dived on the wreck of the *Bounty* (complete with cannons) and the hospitable islanders loaded them up with fruit on their departure.

Northward they sailed to the Gambier Islands, near the French nuclear testing zone, all 800 islands and tiny atolls uninhabited ten years on. Then they journeyed to Tahiti, Tonga, Raratonga in the Cook Islands and Fiji, sails bursting en route. From Brisbane they went to Lizard Island to collect Phylly, Andrew and Co. en route the Top End and Thursday Island.

As one daughter had asked to jump ship, in Darwin they found a Tasmanian couple as new crew and sailed on to Ashmore Shoal and Christmas Island. During their stay some refugee 'boat people' arrived, their awful vessel being towed out to sea and blown up by Customs.

The Cocos-Keeling Islands were next, followed by the Chagos Islands, due south of the Maldives. These had been mostly depopulated during the Cold War, and had an enormous US naval base on site. One day Barry saw the sky completely criss-crossed by jet vapour trails, 'planes circling to the Middle East. Phylly contacted him later, it was September 11th. The Seychelles provided the last family rendezvous : a fortnight on the beautiful archipelago off the northern tip of Madagascar, where the tiny harbour on Nosy Bē was full of home-made dugout canoes

Back toward reality and Richards Bay they were becalmed for four days, ruining Barry's carefully calculated schedule of supplies. The local Rotary Club provided a huge welcome and after all the excitement died down, they decided 2003 was time to sell their company shares and move to Brisbane.

There Barry bought a near-defunct engineering company. A condition of migration was that he employ four people, so with typical De Lacy enthusiasm he established a workforce of 40 to 50. However Brisbane's western suburbs proved too far away from the sea. In 2011 they sold their shares in another management buy-out, building a new home at Doonan, on land formerly owned by fellow bridge players Jan and Roger Edwards.



The adult Andrew, Dad and a Giant Trevally

The travel bug still bites. Shaya Moya remains in the family, moored at Hervey Bay for frequent Barrier Reef voyages. They also acquired a camper trailer and traversed Australia in as direct a line as possible, from the most eastern point (Byron Bay) to the western : Steep Point in the Zuytdorp Cliffs near Shark Bay.

One last sailing anecdote : you must agree Barry is a very capable chap, good to have around when you are up the creek without a paddle. At sea the engineer played electrician, plumber, carpenter, sailmaker, whatever was needed. But the day the Tasmanian crew-woman said his pain-killers were not helping her impacted wisdom tooth, he refused to turn dentist. When her husband also reneged, the lady borrowed Barry's pliers and pulled it out herself.

by Susie Osmaston

Footnote : Those fish in our photographs were actually fairly lucky : once they had posed for the camera, they were released back into the watery depths.