

Windsong berthed in the marina of the Automobile and Touring Club of the Lebanon.

A warrior returns

To the Lebanon aboard a Dunkirk veteran, with Michael Duddridge

“**M**arch to the sound of the guns!” was Marshal Blücher’s advice to his men at Waterloo; but he said nothing about *sailing!* I mused over this as my 13 ton, Hillyard ketch *Windsong* ghosted through the warmth of a velvet Mediterranean night. Again, the rumble of artillery came clearly over the water. It was almost as though the sixty-three year old boat could hear it too: she seemed to stiffen, like an old war-horse. As a Dunkirk Little Ship she knew all about Blücher’s maxim.

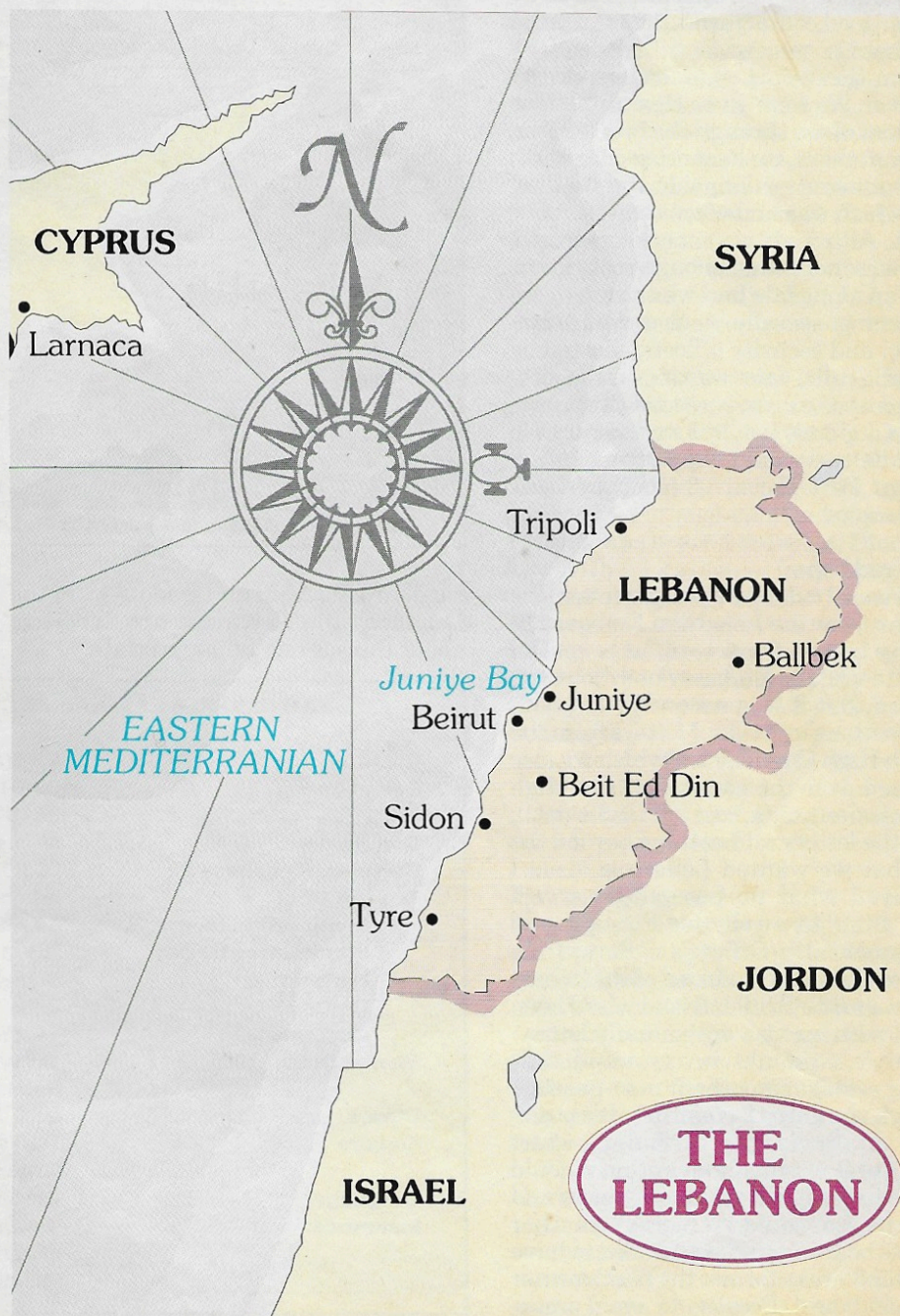
Safety first?

Was this a sensible cruise, I asked myself again? When I’d planned it, the Lebanon seemed to be emerging from its long agony. Yet the visa stamp in our passports was scarcely dry before Hezbollah guerrillas were again locked in conflict with Israeli forces in the south and a quarter of a million refugees were streaming north to Beirut.

During the thirty hour crossing from Cyprus, the four of us aboard had listened intently to the BBC’s World Service bulletins. After each broadcast, the consensus view amongst us seemed to be that if the conflict appeared to be moving north we could always slip our moorings and get out. But now, those detonations over the horizon brought the BBC’s measured tones into a sharper, more immediate focus, and I didn’t feel quite so sanguine.

Can you hear me?

Shortly after dawn, as we approached the 12 mile limit, I began the frustrating task of trying to raise *Oscar Charlie* on either Channel 16 or 11, VHF. I’d been told that failure to make contact with this controlling authority would result in a heavy fine, or worse! Now, as the radio traffic from merchant ships complained of Israeli gunboats ordering them out of the area, my mind became even more marvellously concentrated on the job in-hand. At last, through almost impossibly bad static, we received our clearance number and authority to approach Beirut on a bearing of 090°, calling again at 8 miles range and abeam the breakwater. We were making for Juniye Bay which lies ten miles north-east of Beirut and is the heartland of the Maronite Christian community. In mid-summer, the prevailing, moist, south-westerly

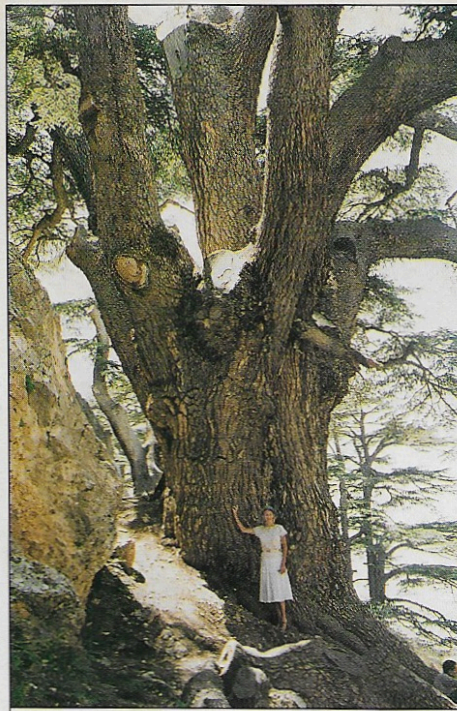




Ready to repel: outside the crusader castle



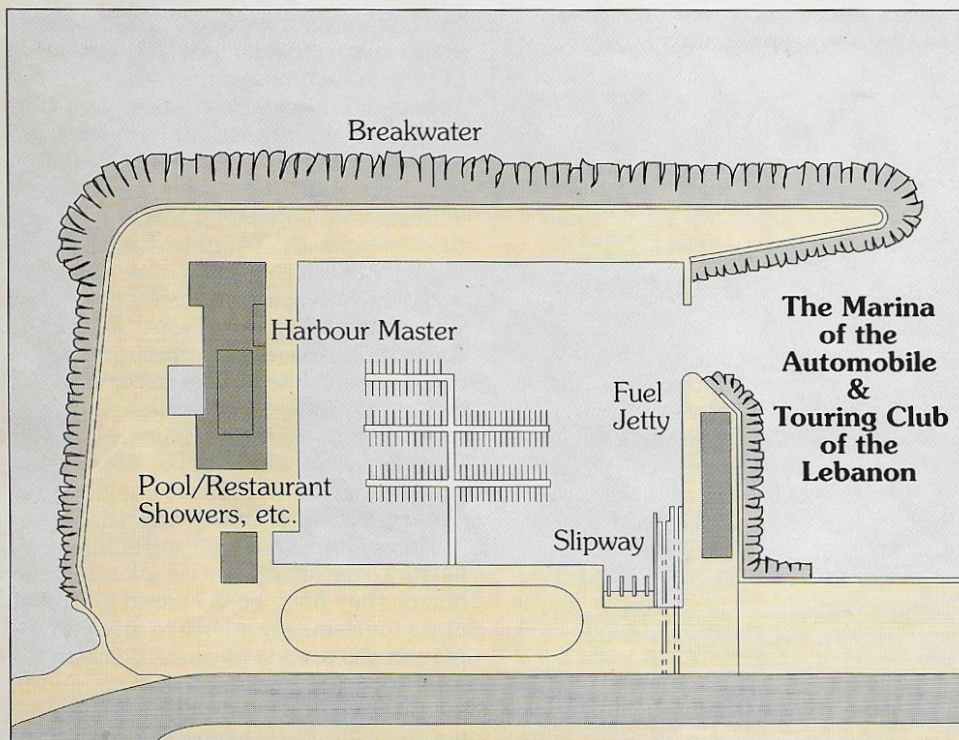
Byblos's bright, attractive fishing harbour



This ancient cedar is about 1000 years old



Another remnant of a troubled past. Exploring the crusader castle at Byblos



morning of our departure, so I was a little apprehensive when the Customs Officer began his questioning. However, his main concern was whether we had brought arms or ammunition with us; I found this ironic in a country which, although only half the size of Wales, must contain more modern weapons of war per acre than any other country on earth.

We were to learn later, to our chagrin, that as a free port, wines and spirits are available in shops at identical, and sometimes cheaper prices than in the bonded store at Larnaca.

These entry formalities had so far cost US\$40. Now came the good news: as its name implies the Automobile and Touring Club of the Lebanon is principally a club. It regards its marina as just another club facility – like its olympic size swimming pool, or championship, floodlit tennis courts. All club amenities are available to visiting yachtsmen, free of charge, and mooring fees are waived for the first week; but I should add that if the number of visiting yachts increases, this concession may be withdrawn.

How to save money

To those British yachtsmen struggling to survive in the 'M.D. plc killing grounds' of the south coast of England, is it possible there'll come a day when it may prove cheaper to keep a boat in the Lebanon and commute there to sail? A 40ft yacht can be berthed at the Touring Club for something in the region of £700 pa. And that includes club membership for owner and family, though I should add that there's an entrance fee and long waiting list.

The facilities provided by the club are superb. From the showers (which when fully turned on could probably hurl you bodily against the opposite wall of the ample cubicle) to the excellent two restaurants and pool-side snack-bar, everything was beyond criticism. Dinner for two with a local wine, for example, averaged about US\$24. And since Lebanese cuisine still bears the unmistakable hall-mark of the years the country spent under French mandate, the value for money is exceptional. A small point for consideration by visiting yachtsmen is the absence of a washing machine in the club. And even outside, in the town of Juniye, you'll find nothing remotely resembling a launderette.

Be on your guard

To advise that touring within the Lebanon should be approached with care is to state the obvious. But a regard for one's safety need not totally inhibit the exploration of a magnificent hinterland. The Commodore of the yachting section of the club, or any of the club officials, are always ready to offer advice on those areas which are safe to visit.

We chose not to explore the coast from the sea, though it's perfectly possible once the entry formalities have been completed. (It's certainly something we intend doing on our next visit, for there are so many anchorages and fishing ha-

wind riding up the Lebanese mountains sometimes blankets both them and the coast in cloud and mist. We all strained our eyes into the murk. We were looking for the double chimneys of the Juniye power station, which stand just two miles south-west along the coast from our destination: the marina of the *Automobile et Touring Club Du Liban*.

No pilot books

Charts of the area are short on variety: *Admiralty 1563* gives good large-scale coverage of Beirut but stops two miles south of Juniye Bay; *Admiralty 2633* covers the whole Lebanese coast but, at 1:300,000, is rather small-scale for coastal work. There are no pilot books or Lebanese charts; even tourist maps are hard to find, and are still regarded as items of military security. But there are no hazards to worry about in the bay itself; the water shelves steeply, and my echo-sounder didn't find the bottom until a cable out from the marina entrance. At last the two massive chimneys, girdled with red and white painted bands, appeared and soon afterwards we were in good contact with the marina on Channel 11.

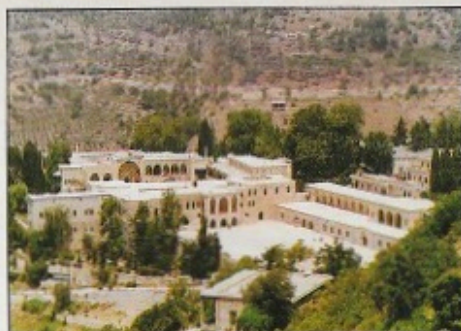
From there-on Lebanese hospitality took over. We were given clear directions to the entrance through the breakwater, and from there, to the most secure berth in the marina – alongside the fuelling jetty, which was under constant 24-hour guard. Although we moored stern-to, there was more than enough room for us to tie-up alongside had we chosen.

As our passerelle went down, immigration and security officers, alerted by our radio calls, were waiting on the jetty to come aboard. They needed two copies each of our crew list, but were content to take one completed copy of my Imray Foreign Port Form, which they later photo copied.

More red tape

Our visas had been bought over the counter from the Lebanese Embassy in Nicosia before departure, at a cost of US\$20 each. The Embassy had, however, insisted that it was necessary for us to bring with us individual letters from the British High Commission which we also obtained over the counter at the High Commission, at a cost of US\$8 each. Since the letters said nothing beyond the fact that we wanted Lebanese visas I wondered what purpose they served, other than to swell the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices's coffers; I became even more convinced of this when, later, we met a British friend who'd been issued with his visa without any letter.

There's no doubt in my mind that having visas smoothed our passage through the entry formalities. It's possible to obtain visas on arrival, for short stays, but it was made clear that it could only be in exceptional circumstances and then the fee would be higher. Another point to bear in mind is the need to have a certified proxy form if the boat's owner is not on board. Finally, do avoid a pas-



Palace of Emir Beshir at Beit Ed Din



Juniye Bay showing harbours & marina



Byblos: Looking southwest along the coast from the crusader ruins



No, not Nice. This is the marina of The Automobile & Touring Club of the Lebanon

sage directly from an Israeli port to the Lebanon; the Lebanese are sensitive about this, as one can appreciate.

Farewell to arms

Our enthusiasm had got the better of us in the bonded store in Larnaca on the

AUTOMOBILE ET TOURING CLUB DU LIBAN FACTS & FIGURES

Position:	33° 59'.28N 035° 37'.11E	
Telephone:	09-917570/09-917590/09-911220	
FAX:	9619-917580	
Commodore:	Michael Naufal	
Currency (Lebanese £):	L£1,730 = US\$1 (US\$ widely accepted)	
Fees (in US\$)	Inbound	Outbound
Immigration (boat)	14.45	Nil
Immigration (crew)	Nil	14.45 per passport
Harbour	5.78	5.78
Doctor	5.78	Nil
Customs	14.45	14.45
Marina Dues:	1st week free	
	Subsequent weeks: LOA x Beam (ft) x 0.006 x 7	
Diesel:	US\$ 0.24 per litre	
Repairs:	Two slipways capable of hauling the largest yachts	
Language:	Arabic, but French and English is widely spoken.	
Insurance:	'Eastern Mediterranean' usually means not East of the 35° meridian; which the Lebanon is, so check with your insurance company.	