There are many reasons for sailing offshore. Some may enjoy pitting their wits against the forces of nature. Others may take a more functional view, the convenience of getting from A to B. In my mind the principal reason is to leave land and much else besides, to live, if only for a short time, in another world.

This other world is detached, separate and distinct from the everyday. Being offshore and away from home and work may not be trouble-free but is not bound by the limitations that beset landed life. Leastways it was so until the temptations of mobile phones, Internet and Wi-Fi access allowed business callers to intrude even offshore, even when far away in the Med, even on Good Friday.

In any rational world I should have left that phone/pad/laptop at home and respected the intention to be apart. Out of touch, offline, switched off, gone away. The value of a retreat is often found in the advancement it brings – thinking things through, getting ideas and feelings into some sort of perspective.

I may be relaxed but I didn’t immediately switch off and, until this latter half of the voyage, I am yet to discover that sense of advancement. Excusing my snatched moments of connectedness as reassurance for those at home, or the modern equivalent of a picture postcard ‘wishing you were here’, is no good reason for clinging to the essence of on-shoreness, of missing the news, of pretending to be in two or three places at once. It is no doubt convenient that every shore-side taverna provides Wi-Fi, that every bay on every island now has a mobile signal but, until these threads are broken, that inner urge to be ‘Captain of my fate/Master of my soul’ is still qualified by an all-too-easy reference to digital weather forecasts, GPS position indicators and the auto-helm.

There is, I will admit, a line to be drawn between desire and safety. On-shore the former may too easily displace the latter and at sea the latter should always trump the former. It is not that I do not care. The fundamental reason I am here is in that desire to be in another world and, in this next week, there will be minimal reassuring calls, and no texts, or pictures, or emails, or
tweets.

And for those still on-shore it will most probably be a blessed relief that I have, at last, ‘gone away’.

Vathi (Ithaca) 8th April 2012

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Groupe Intellex returns on April 16th.