



ELISHA's Cruise Lymington to Gibraltar & Mediterranean France in 2006





Introduction

Elisha and I had for some time thought about taking our boat to the Mediterranean by Gibraltar, just gently port hopping, waiting for the right weather and seeing lots of new places. That was the plan anyway. Elisha was adamant that she would not cross the Bay of Biscay and was duly re-assured. This was true as I only planned to creep round the edges. Later this led to me to being accused of me being economical with the truth.

There would only be Elisha and myself. Skipper and mate but no crew as such. But then we planned no night passages and of course no sails to hoist.

The boat, ELISHA, was our Jeanneau Prestige Open 34 Hardtop. With a length of 34 feet (10 metres) and a very broad beam she was comfortable enough for two.

The twin Volvo 43 diesels gave us a cruising speed of 25 knots in calm sea, but consequently were going to use a lot of diesel, and calm seas proved to be in short supply. We knew it would be expensive on the Continent but we got the worst case with rocketing oil prices on top of punitive taxes. Our 700 litre diesel capacity gave us a good range, but the bill was a bit eye watering when we filled up.

We had been up the west coast of Scotland and visited the Outer Hebrides in 2005 in so had a good feel for her capabilities and weak points.

There was not a lot of preparation to do. I already had the tools I needed to do my own maintenance and a stock of engine consumables such as anodes, filters and impellers.

We had a Raymarine Radar and C80 Chart Plotter which are quite excellent. I had already decided the Navtex was useless and wasn't too happy about the VHF Radio which seemed to have an awful lot of static but then I'm not in the habit of calling people so I crossed my fingers. I think the problems of both are probably poor installation, neither were fitted by Jeanneau who, strangely, will build in the radar and chart plotter at the factory but leave the dealer to stick in the radio any old where.

I had all the Pilot Books up to Gibraltar and many paper charts. The Imray charts are not detailed enough in my view but coupled with the Chart Plotter and its Navionics Gold software it worked well enough. Unfortunately Spain is still not accurately plotted for GPS everywhere and it was alarming indeed, at Santa Maria de Ortiguera, when the Raymarine plotter showed us calmly mooring across dry land. Anyone who has driven in mainland Spain using a GPS is likely to have experienced the problem. Paper charts are still essential. I would have liked larger scale charts to be truly happy but the cost becomes a bit ridiculous.

We allowed 4 months, after which I had to get back to do some work, and agreed Gibraltar was not a target that we must make, to avoid feeling under too much pressure. We thought we might well leave the boat somewhere on the way and come back for it the following year. As it turned out we went far further and ended up in Mediterranean France.

It was not a terribly demanding voyage and took us to many places where we met many friendly and interesting people.

I have given costs, distances etc. in the Appendix along with other information.

To avoid confusion between the Jeanneau called ELISHA and Elisha (my wife) I generally refer to it as 'the boat' or if named do it in caps -ELISHA.

To The Channel Islands

Wednesday 3rd May 2006 - Lymington to Alderney

We left Lymington on at 10:05. Anne-Marie (our daughter) kindly dropped us down to the boat which we had left overnight on the Lymington Town Sailing Club pontoon. I was tired having slept badly for two nights worrying about what I might have forgotten, or not checked, and whether the whole thing was wise anyway. Anne-Marie arrived to collect us with a heavy cold and I was terrified of catching it at the start of our journey, and so thoroughly irritable.

I had planned to run straight to St Peters Port in Guernsey through the Ortac Channel west of Alderney and had invested in a large scale chart of it as it was new to me and had a doubtful reputation.

The weather, NE F3/4 forecast, was reasonable. Sea state goodish but tide flooding so losing us a knot or so of speed. At first all was well but half way across the Channel, just as we reached the shipping lanes, we entered a thick bank of fog. Not a good start. Even with Radar, creeping through visibility of about 50 feet at 6 knots with mysterious blobs on the screen all around is not fun. Especially when you know the blob may be a 60,000 ton ship doing over 20 knots with nobody on the bridge. Elisha peered to port while I concentrated on Starboard. The sea got up as well and the pitching made it difficult to use MARPA (which gives you the distance, speed and course of blobs) and anyway I wanted to be looking out, not at the screen. I thought it was pretty grim if this was the end of our voyage. Squashed in the channel in the fog by a tanker that would not even know he had hit you. No style.

After an hour the fog thinned a bit and we pushed the speed up to 15 knots. I could see a ship on radar very close on the starboard stern quarter but not by eye. Then suddenly she appeared, maybe ¼ mile away just where the radar said. The sun was now trying to burn through and eerily illuminated a pale blue container ship silently slipping along. Unusually it had slowed down, so even they thought the fog bad.

After that the fog faded away till Alderney came in sight in the clear. I abandoned thoughts of the Ortac Channel and St Peters Port with reluctance as we had now missed the tide and were feeling tired, so into familiar Braye Harbour. Hardly anybody there. The harbour office did not answer VHF radio, increasingly common, but answered a mobile call. We moored to a buoy for £12 and went ashore for a beer and food. We were on our way but not the easy crossing I'd have liked.

The NE wind rose to F4/5 overnight pitching us about crazily at the mooring so no sleep. In the morning the wind had died off to a F3.

Thursday 4th May 2006 – Alderney to Guernsey, St Peters Port

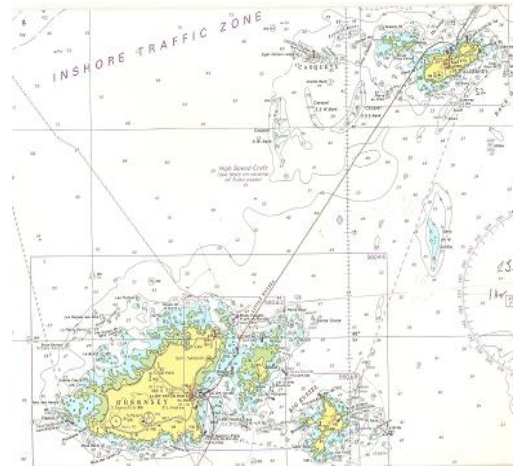
The sun shone and the wind was light, the Little Russel Channel was in a good mood. I remembered before, in a smaller boat, that it could be truly nasty.



Lymington to Alderney



Better Weather - Alderney to St Peters Port



Alderney to St Peter's Port

The Harbour Master, when I asked him the best time for the Swinge, took a look at the boat and said not to worry about the right tide with the power we had. Just go. In a sailing boat I'd carefully have calculated the speed and direction of the tide but now I could easily stem it or run with it without it taking control. He gave us waypoints and we dog legged through, much closer to Alderney than routes I had taken before but no problem, and had a lovely run to St Peters Port.

We have seen it grey with rain, poor visibility, strong wind and tide and nasty overfalls, then it looks like a different world. We tucked in to the Marina basin at St Peters Port close to shops and eating places. Elisha was much restored by the easy run with the sun shining and no fog.

Later we went to see Victor Hugo's house – a must but we had missed it before. What an insight to a strange unhappy exile. Weird décor. The lower floor is all dark and it gets lighter as you go up till daylight on the top floor looking over to Herm. He felt apparently that one must struggle from the dark to the light and enlightenment, which was ultimately death. Tragic man. He had two daughters. One at seventeen fell for an English Lieutenant. He was posted to America and she followed him where in the end she had to accept he was not interested in her. She wandered America on her own for some years, lost her mind and committed suicide. A pretty girl too from the old photograph. The other daughter married at nineteen, happily to his delight. But she and her husband fell accidentally, into a river while picnicking, and both drowned.



Victor Hugo had fled the French government but did not like the British and yearned for home. His extraordinary rant in *Les Misérables* about the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo made his feelings clear. It was the defeat of the beautiful the brave, the romantic by the crude and unimaginative. He spent a lot of money travelling the battlefield erecting monuments to dead French officers with wordy tributes carved on them.

Brittany

Friday 5th May 2006 – St Peters Port to Ploumanac'h

We fuelled up at St Peters Port next day, conscious this was the cheapest fuel we would get till Gibraltar. The weather was lovely, and we ran south west for Ploumanac'h, about 60 miles, on the north Brittany coast. It was a beautiful run with little wind but some swell. Elisha was increasingly happy, I think she thought it might be like the Channel crossing, grim and nerve racking, all the way.

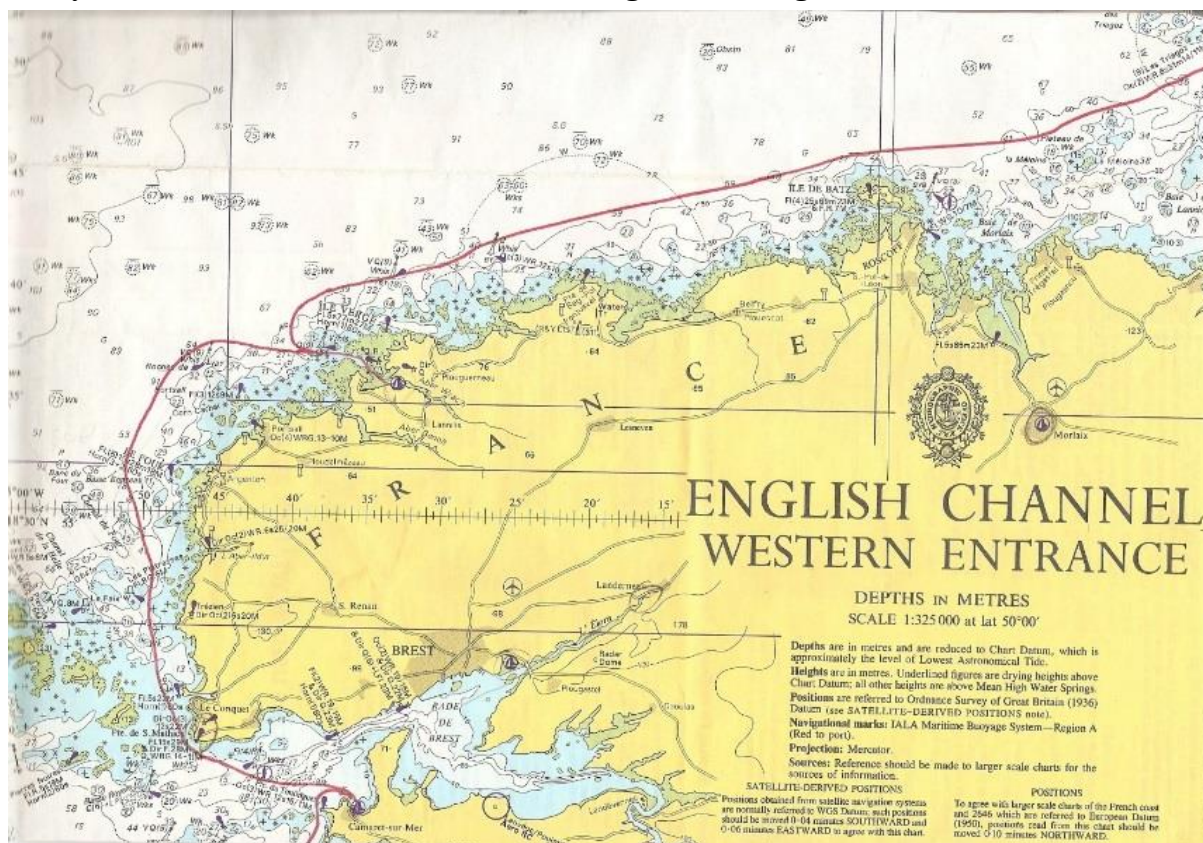
On the run across Elisha worried that we saw no shipping, hardly even a fishing boat all the way. Where was everybody? We were alone in the world on an endless sea. Was there something we didn't know?

We entered Ploumanac'h, past the famous pink granite rocks and little château, between the high ground, on a neap tide. You go up the river and cross a sill which holds the water in the pool with the moorings. The river up to the sill dries out with spring tides but we had no problem and moored to one of their strange dumbbell buoys before taking the dinghy ashore. The place was deserted. No Harbour Master till July so it was free. We walked across to Peros Guiriac on the other side of the peninsula but thought little of it.

We were now in Brittany and feeling a lot happier. Perhaps we had left fog and the cold entirely behind us. In the morning I got some French bread. No other country seems to be able to match the morning French Baguette.



Moored up in Ploumanac'h



The run to L'Aberwrac'h & the Chenal du Four

Saturday 6th May 2006 - Ploumanac'h to L'Aberwrac'h

The next morning we crept quietly over the tidal sill and down the deserted river, past the pink granite rocks and the little Chateau, and out towards the Isles du Sept before turning west for L'Aberwrac'h along the north Brittany coast, going outside Isle Batz.

L'Aberwrac'h is a good port to wait for the tide before rounding the headland and turning south into the Chenal du Four.

I sipped black coffee and chewed my baguette as we cruised along. It seemed a pity to press on with so many lovely little ports to call in on the way, but time and tide.....

We had a long easy run along the rocky coast to the Libenter Cardinal marker and dog legged into the river to moor up to the L'Aberwrac'h pontoon. Like Ploumanac'h it had not woken up for the year yet, but we did find the Harbour Master and pay. Another very peaceful night. Little happening in May and no visitors.

The gangway to the pontoon had been badly twisted by the winter storms and would certainly have put the whole lot out of use in UK. Since we were last there they have stopped use of the hammerhead pontoon for larger boats and banned catamarans. Just too much strain on the pontoon as the tides rush through I think. There is a 10m (34 foot) length limit, but a 40 foot yacht had come in and squeezed itself onto a finger. It projected way beyond the other craft. These narrow 'catwalk' fingers have no cleats, only rings. When you jump out onto them to thread your rope through a ring they bounce up and down leaving you on your hands and knees clinging on. We managed it this time, but we now have two engines and a bow thruster which helps. Why can't they use cleats which you can drop a rope over?

Sunday 7th May 2006 - L'Aberwrac'h to Camaret

We left for the Chenal du Four in the morning and we planned to get to Camaret. I had reminded Elisha about the possible swell as we rounded the cape. The usual swell was there alright and was in good form, a bit wind of wind had got up so Elisha adopted her policy of not looking out of the boat which, according to her, excited description seemed likely to do a reverse summersault as we climbed up the steep sides of the swell. It is often on the corner just out of L'Aberwrac'h that the it is at its worst.

Once into the Chenal du Four the sea died off and we stumbled through the channel. The chart plotter is great but it is so easy to rely completely on it, easier to see a buoy on the plotter than looking out. Not a problem so much in the Chenal where the charting is very good (it needs to be!) but approaching some ports buoys have been added which are not on the plotter, and some shown on the plotter are no longer there!

Out of the Chenal and across the bay to Camaret with the Goulet¹, the aptly named channel to Brest, on our left, dodging racing fleets as we went in. We were surprised to find it apparently full but spotted a berth and reversed in. Two very friendly characters, Mike and Jim, appeared to take our ropes. It seemed there was a second hand boat show on taking all the visitors berths and ours had become free only just as we entered the harbour. Jim lives in Camaret and keeps his boat there. Mike kept his boat there too and spent a lot of time on it. As Mike said his 40 footer cost £7,000 a year in the Hamble, and nobody seemed to want him there much. In Camaret it is €1,200 and he knows everybody. We went and had coffee on Mike's boat and chatted about good and bad places to visit on the way south. As Mike and Jim disagreed about most of them it was not conclusive!

We loved Camaret. Warmer, quiet off season, friendly and inexpensive. Again length restriction, no boats more than 11m, although a few 40 footers had sneaked

¹ Literally 'The Gullet'.

in. Neither Jim nor Mike had been to Ile du Seine, 'why go there?' Jim said. 'Just rocks and scrub'. Mike did not like Benodet. 'Full of yachties' he said.

We walked along the coast past Point Toulanget. Beautiful walk reminiscent of Scotland with towering cliffs and great gorges. Depressing though because of the amazing amount of grim grey German concrete gun emplacements and fortifications. Many of them were cracked and broken by bombing. Huge craters showed where the bombs had missed 60 years ago. How many bomber crew lives were lost? What incredible effort and money the Germans had put into these defences. How ugly they were. They seemed continuous, you cannot believe how many.

Somewhere towards the tip of the point I lost Elisha. I had got ahead, as usual I fear, and when I turned to look back she was gone. I searched back and forward amongst the scrub and abandoned fortifications but she was not there. For an hour and a half I searched. Could she have fallen down one of the great jagged holes and caverns in the fortifications? Could she have slipped over one of the cliffs?

It seemed unlikely for she is careful and cautious. In the end despairing I concluded that somehow I had missed her and she would have returned to the boat. So I walked back at speed the several miles – and there she was, got there just ahead of me. I was mightily relieved to see her.

Jim came aboard and chatted and we ate on the boat.

We liked it so much we spent three nights there. The next day we walked in the other direction which was nicer with no fortifications. We took a picnic and ate it overlooking Camaret Bay. I was very happy. The weather, apart from the channel, had been kind. I could think of little to worry about. The unknown lay ahead, taking us into waters we had not been to before. Elisha was obviously relaxed and happy, at least partly because we had had no rough sea.

Retrospectively I am very glad we did do the Scottish voyage to the Hebrides last year. Good practise but it was hard. Head winds virtually all the way, head seas of course. Speed reduced, boat slamming, rain pitching down, and mostly cold. I think Elisha thought it might be like that going south. Maybe it will change but so far it is very different.

The whole area is steeped in British naval history. Those astonishing fleets of wooden ships which, throughout the Napoleonic wars, blockaded the coast. Right through the winter gales of a coast littered with rocks and horrendous tides the inshore fleet of smaller ships watched French movements, nosing up the Goulet to peer into Brest. Out of sight in the English Channel the great ships of the line, under superb commanders like Cornwallis, waited for battle if the French dared to come out. There was no respite. Food, water and fuel were brought out by supply ships, the water hoys having been specially designed and built. Return to port without permission was a Court Martial offence.

Cornwallis spent over two years at sea, never putting a foot on land. What sailors they were. Anyone who wants to get a feel of what it was like can not do better than read C .S. Forrester's 'Hornblower & The Hotspur'.

Wednesday 10th May 2006 – Camaret to Loctudy

We reluctantly left Camaret, Jim and Mike, and set off for lunch on Ile de Seine. It seemed a pity to miss an interesting bit of pilotage. An easy run in smooth sea, a touch misty. The entrance is not difficult. Well buoyed and a lovely anchorage. What a remote little settlement.

We went ashore for a beer and something to eat. It is tiny, just a couple of sandbanks really, surrounded by rocks. We were tempted to spend the night but pushed on through the notorious Raz du Seine, absolutely calm, across Audierne Bay to Loctudy, a fishing port with a marina. Bought fresh fish off fishing boats. Pleasant but nothing special.



The Raz du Seine

Thursday 11th May 2006 – Loctudy to Benodet Next day we barbecued the fish on a beach in the estuary, then entered Benodet and moored up easily to the main marina pontoon in a sluicing tide.

We liked Benodet. We walked the pleasant river paths, relaxed and bought steak for more barbecues. We had bought six excellent disposable barbecues before leaving and they were a great success. Grill your meal on a beach then douse the barbecue and take it back with you leaving not a trace behind.

Friday 12th May 2006 – Benodet to Concarneau



Ghost Ship - Iles Glennan



Lunch on the Misty Iles Glennan

I didn't want to miss Iles Glennan and I was increasingly confident of pilotage in what appeared to be a maze of rocks on the chart. They are all well buoyed. There was the usual misty morning as we crept in to the bay and anchored. Beautiful, a bit like Scillies and NW Scotland with clear water, sandy bays and the landscape changing dramatically as the tide rises and falls. Covering and then revealing vast areas of rock and sand. We anchored and barbecued the steak ashore. Fantastic.

The weather pattern has been fixed since L'Aberach. Cool calm mornings with light mist. By midday mist lighter and completely gone by about 1500 by which time wind F3, maybe touching F4. By evening wind gone and beautiful clear blue sky and warm.

We should have spent the night really but went on into Concarneau marina in front of the old town. There is room for bigger boats here and that always puts prices up. An extraordinary place with a completely walled old town on an island with a drawbridge – 'to keep the English out?' I asked. 'No, to keep the French out he replied.' Very pleasant and the biggest town since leaving home.

The port office is only open 09:00 to 18:00 and showers and toilet are only available then. Elisha went for a shower at 17:00 and the water was cold. Nothing really wakes up till 15th June it appears.

I got yesterday's newspapers and enjoyed reading them. Struck by the case of the two girls who murdered their German skipper in the Atlantic and threw his body overboard 24 years ago. Again and again I read of disaster brought about by picking up girls, who appear to be staggeringly naïve, in the Canaries to cross the Atlantic with. The girl's claimed the Skipper and his mate had expected a bit of sex in return for food and free passage. This led to exasperated attempted rape but between them the girls knifed the Skipper and heaved his body overboard. The terrified mate locked himself in the fore cabin. While the girl's story is probably true it seems strange you can knife a man, shove his body overboard and not even stand trial. Of course it was legally difficult. The boat was in international waters so the law of no country applied. The dead man was German, the murderesses were British. Piracy seemed unlikely to succeed and nobody wanted to bring charges.

We planned to move on to Port Manech and the Belon River to moor for the night. Only about 15nm. The weather is stuck in this cool misty mode with smooth sea but it could be warmer. An Atlantic low pressure area is hanging around and shows no sign of shifting.

Saturday 13th May – Concarneau to Belon River

We had an easy run round the point to Manech. The tide was too low to go up the Belon River so we picked up a mooring at Manech for lunch. An hour later, after lunch on a sandy beach, we crept up the Belon River over the bar which closes entry in bad weather.

We found a lovely Visitors mooring in a bend at the top of the river and I secured our bow and stern ropes to buoys. A line of blue, cheap but strong, floating rope ran between the buoys and I picked it and took a turn round the cleats fore and aft for security. We walked for hours on the beautiful wooded banks. A very peaceful night – and free. Must leave before 11:00 though to get over the bar. We will head for Port Tudy on Ile de Groix.

Sunday 14th May – Belon River to Ile de Groix

After a pleasant night securely moored with the tide rushing in and out we cast off at 09:30. At least we tried! The tide pouring out of the river swirled round the bend and pressed hard on the starboard side of the boat. When I went to release the floating line from the fore and aft cleats I couldn't get it off. No way would it unhitch with the pressure. These plastic ropes seem to meld into each other and jam fast. I managed to relieve the strain on the bow cleat by using my own rope to take the pressure and release it, but I could not shift the stern with the current now piling the water onto the blunt transom. I couldn't very well just cut the rope and leave it, tempted though I was.

In the end I had to go to the mooring buoy in the dinghy and untie the blue rope. Once we were free I was able to reconnect the blue rope and loosen our ropes in a controlled manner. It took 30 minutes and I was sure I'd miss the tide.

It was spitting rain with a SW F3 but we cleared the bar just in time and had an easy run about 20 nm to Port Tudy on Ile de Groix. We moored up in the inner harbour which was undistinguished with not very nice facilities. The Harbour Master was very amiable and helped me with my French. Apparently 'ammarage' is a rope but 'ammarer' is to tie the rope or berth. So 'Je voudrai un ammarer pour le nuit pour mon bateaux' is correct. I now understand I had asked in the past for a piece of rope for the night. I do find the French generally delighted that you are trying to speak French. We walked on the island, magnificent coastal paths. 75% of the place is shut out of season. We decided to go to Lorient the next day.

We were entertained by a Harbour Dolphin swishing and arching around the boats. Apparently he/she was well known.

We were sitting with a glass of wine about 17:30 while I studied the chart for the Lorient entrance when three uniformed officials arrived. I first thought it was the Harbour Master come for his money. However they announced themselves as douanes, customs. They came on board, examined our papers, asked lots of questions and searched the boat. They went through Elisha's handbag and her soft makeup bag, tearing the zip out as they fumbled to find a way in to it. They rummaged in all the lockers. Had we spirits? Had we guns? Had we anything to declare? Where had we been? In the end they left and gave us a clearance note to show to other French douanes who might stop us. We had of course nothing to worry about but I was glad I had prepared the boat papers methodically and put them in plastic sleeves. Mike at Camaret had complained that the officials were aggressive at Lorient. I just thought they were typical officials. It is not their job to be nice, but they were courteous enough. Mike had trouble because he had no French courtesy flag and argued, correctly in law, that it was not required. But it seems to me only polite to fly a courtesy flag in foreign waters, and I'm all for a quiet life.

Tuesday 16th May – Ile de Groix to Lorient

We awoke on Tuesday to another misty overcast day and went across to Lorient, the central marina out of a choice of six! A big industrial and naval port. Old warships rotting, new warships and ferries. We squeezed into a space. My French failed just as I thought I had it right. I think I just ask for a 'place'.

Lorient is dead. No traffic, few people, restaurants closed, what is this? This is not a tourist town. Wandered around the centre and returned to the boat for bread and soup.

Wednesday 17th May – Lorient to Port St Louis

Next day we moved across to Port St Louis on the far estuary bank as the forecast for Belle Isle is NE F4 so right on the nose for 30 miles. Anyway it is a bad outlook. We decided Port St Louis was a good place to hole up. An amiable harbour master gave us a pontoon berth and warned us of the big storm coming in from Biscay. He was most anxious that we understood there was a gale coming and that we did not attempt to move on till it had passed, I had no intention of doing so. Looks like we could be here till next week. He spoke a little English and when he mentioned Biscay Elisha wanted to know what we were doing in Biscay. I explained I had said we wouldn't cross Biscay, we were not actually in Biscay, just on the edge. It seems we had misunderstood each other.

We wandered around Port St Louis which is a charming place. We took the bus to the supermarche and bought more disposable barbecues, which turned out to be useless, and food. Also a burner for the spare gas cylinder so we can cook artichokes, steaks and so on, outside the boat. Getting colder with spitting rain and a rising wind.

Thursday we spent walking round the coast. The degree to which the place is closed up is amazing. Two and a half hours for lunch and closed on Thursdays seems

common. In July apparently it all happens! Winds increasing with heavy squally showers.

The gale built up to a peak of F9 and the boat was wrenching at its cleats terribly as the wind tried to tear it off its pontoon. Listening to the groans of protest from the ropes I suddenly thought that I was using braided rigging ropes for shore lines. They have no 'give' which is what they are designed for. For this reason nylon anchor ropes are recommended as they have stretch. Phillipe had supplied me nylon mooring ropes with the boat but they were rather thick and very long so I had them in the bottom of a locker. I got them out and fitted them and they were the solution with surprising stretch. No protest from the cleats and a lot quieter in the boat.

I wanted to visit the German U-Boat Pens but 'not open till July'. There they still sit. Indestructible grey concrete bearing the scars of many British bombs. We took the bus to Riantec. Nothing there really. Had a coffee in a bar full of local people who were very friendly. Every girl arriving kissed every man on both cheeks and every man similarly kissed every woman on both cheeks. Elisha and I were greeted cheerfully and the men shook hands but we did not get kissed.

The courtesy of French children in the country areas is striking. 'Bonjour Monsieur' they say politely as they pass by, stepping aside if the path is narrow.

The castle at Port Louis is superb with a very strong position and a moat of raging sea. Like many of the castles in the area it was originally built to keep out the French! Bretons did not want to be part of France and fought for years to avoid it.

We took the train to Quimper to pass time but the train was expensive, unlike the very cheap and efficient busses and ferries.

We were stuck in Port St Louis for six nights with the gale raging, only leaving on Tuesday 23rd May to run to Belle Ile when the wind died off. Nothing wrong with Port St Louis but we were so glad to escape.

Tuesday 23rd May – Port St Louis to Le Palais, Belle Isle

The wind was forecast F3 NW but I think really was F4. We left by the South channel, very slowly as I was worried about getting the buoys mixed up with the North channel. As we cleared the channel the sea was a bit lumpy with swell and the aftermath of the gale but even clear of the shelter of Ile de Groix we were able to hold 20 – 22 knots with reasonable comfort.

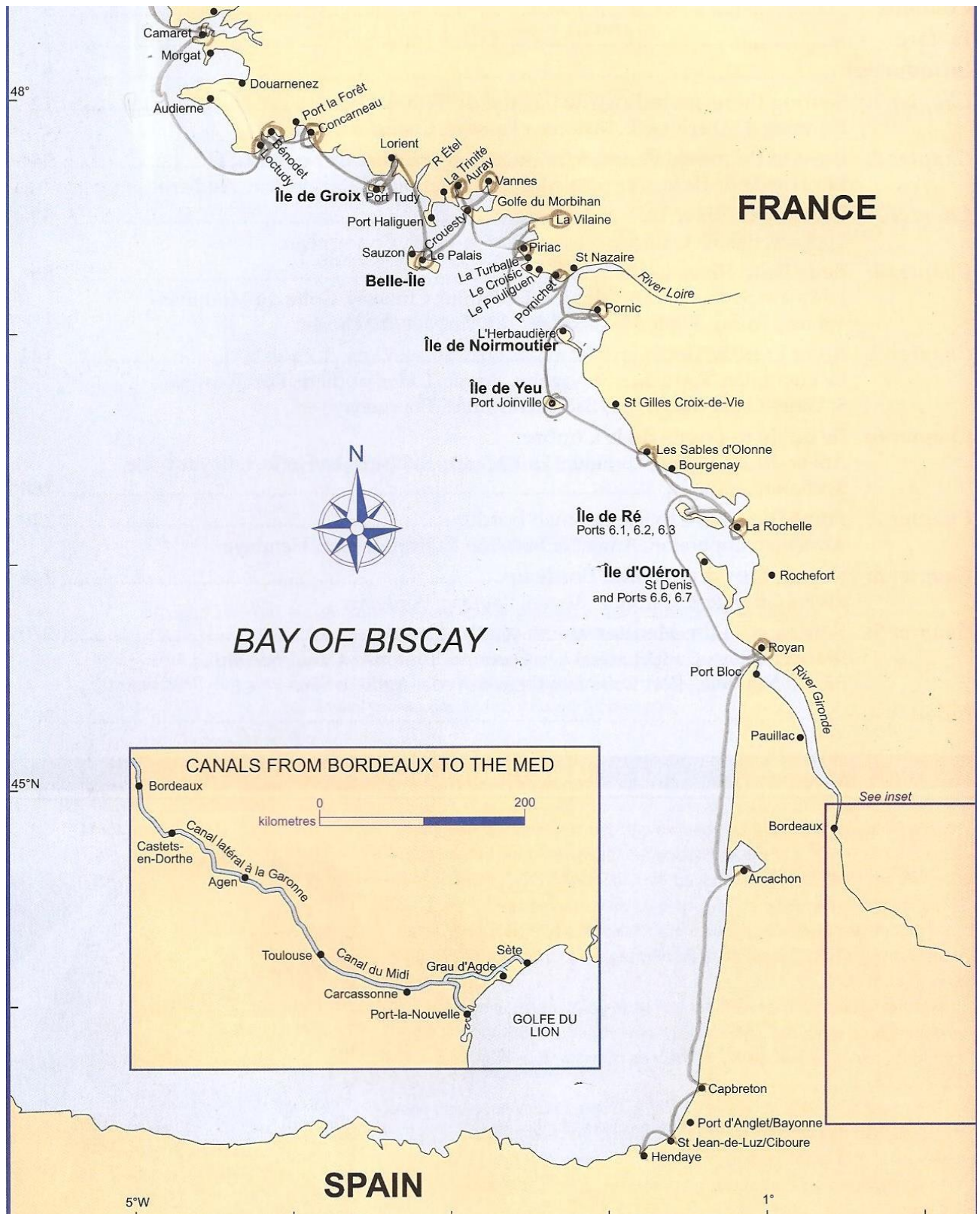
Belle Isle provided increasing shelter and by the time we approached La Palais we were shielded from the west wind. We came through the narrow entrance and decided to moor to the breakwater wall with stern to a buoy but just as Elisha was looping the bow rope round a chain the harbour master came streaking up to sort us out. He offered us a place in the inner harbour but I said no so we followed him to moorings near the town. He zipped around in his battered rib taking the bow rope for the bow buoy and then the stern rope for the stern buoy and neatly moored us up. Easiest mooring we have had yet!

La Palais is really nice and full of life with the car ferry storming into the tiny harbour every hour and performing pirouettes. To our astonishment he hasn't hit anything so far.

We wandered around the amazing and massive Vauban fortress – La Citadel – with its multiple ditches and superb views over the harbour where we could see our tiny boat far below. Nobody could ever take such a fortress surely, but the British did in about 1760 from the sea, scaling the cliffs, and occupied Belle Isle for 10 years to the fury of the French. I expect it was a perfidious sneak attack.

In the evening I was lounging in the boat cockpit with a glass of wine. I was astonished, and nearly spilt my wine, when a blond female head silently appeared, her eyes level with mine, and greeted me. I offered her a glass of wine but she had come for the money and replaced the zippy guy. She spoke no English apart from 'good evening', which she kept repeating with pride. She had not tied on the rib and

stood balanced on the tube writing out our ticket using both hands. I was sure she would fall in, but she didn't, and cheerfully sped away.





Tucked up in Port St Louis for the coming gale



The French Don't Bother with Sissy Fenders!



Superb Sea Moat at Port Louis Citadel



Moored in La Palais – Belle Isle



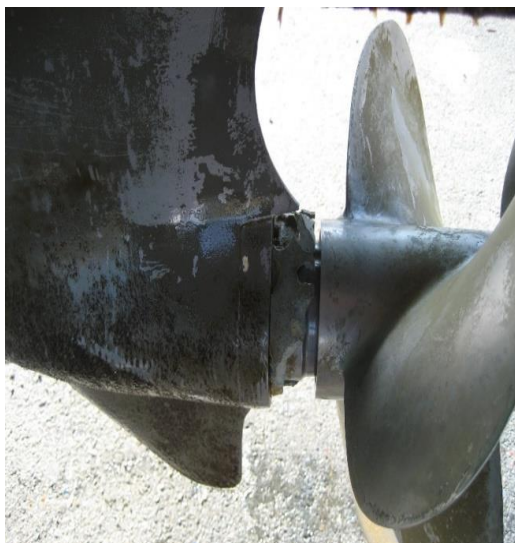
Pauline, Phil and others at Crouesty



Fortifications at Belle Isle. But the British took them !



Ile D'Artz Gulf of Morbihan



**Volvo Ring Anodes Needed
Frequent Replacement**

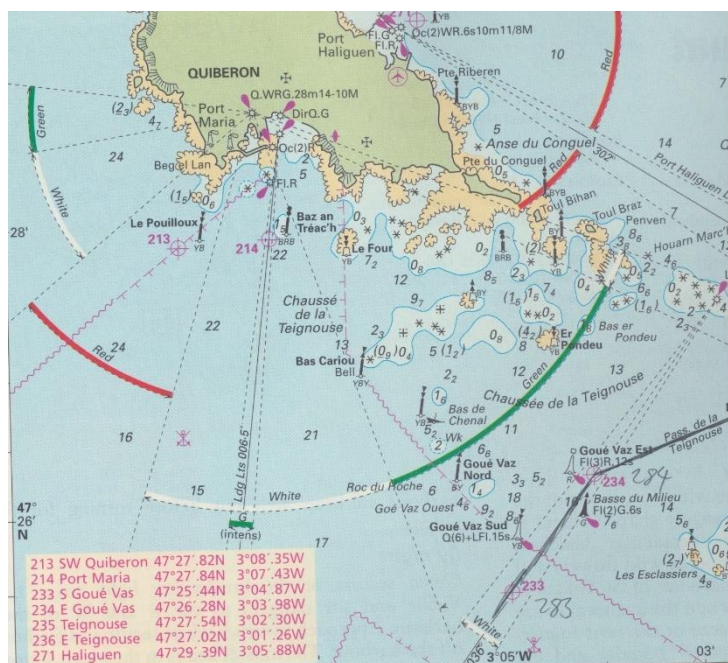


Moored in Auray



Wednesday 24th May – Belle Isle to Port Crouesty

We reluctantly left La Palais but bad weather was forecast again and we did not want to get stuck, We ran the 17 nm to Port Crouesty with a F4 gusting F5 from the east which was on our port quarter so not too bad. It was quite rough going through the La Teignouse passage which is a tricky dog leg through reefs and the sea piled up. Because of the 'dog leg' you do hold course directly towards rocks with white breaking seas before making the turn to starboard. Elisha was very relieved when we finally made the turn, unconvinced that I'd got my navigation right.



Coming into Port Crouesty the wind squallied up to a good F6 and was directly on our stern. A small yacht of about 25 feet was puttering up the channel ahead of us at about 2 knots and a yacht coming in the other direction stopped me overtaking. With both engines in neutral I was still running him down and had to use reverse to hold position. This is something yachties are blissfully unaware of when they choose to go very slowly in a channel, fact is you can't do that in a planing boat.

Crouesty is a gigantic marina, the biggest on the Atlantic coast I think. It is nicer than first appearances suggest and very geared to racing yachts.

We met Pauline and Phil from Grimsby in 'Willwind of Moss' and two other Brits and went up to a bar where we drank and danced and generally had a great evening. Pauline had been a nurse and Phil a porter working most of their lives in a Grimsby hospital. Grimsby is aptly named and they wanted something more out of life. So they'd spent five years renovating a semi derelict boat, given up their home and were now seeking adventure and a wider world. We met them again in Ile de Yeu and in Portugal. We were in touch for some time but sadly I seem to have lost their email address. I wonder what happened to them? I wish them well.

As Crouesty had all the boatyard facilities and a Volvo agent I considered if any maintenance was needed. I tilted up the outdrives and, as I half expected, the ring anodes were practically gone. To replace them involves taking off the four propellers (two on each drive) so the boat has to be lifted out.

I took the dinghy across to the boatyard and negotiated a lift out. It would be a week away before they could fit us in because they did not work Tuesday, Thursday or weekends! Also the boat had to spend a night out on the hard. They had no power hose, it was up to you to hire one if you wanted to clean the bottom. I went to the Volvo agent and, in slow French, arranged for them to come and do the work. I felt it was easier and they could bring a power hose as well. So to fill in the week we decided to visit the Gulf of Morbihan, a fantastic inland sea with a narrow entrance like Poole Harbour, but very much bigger.

Monday 28th May – Port Crouesty to Isle du Moines

The fog was lighter and we left Port Crouesty for the Gulf. Although it was low water at Port Navalo at the entrance the tide was still streaming out of the Gulf and the warnings of very strong currents were obviously correct. A hazard was fleets of Hoby Cats, or something similar, which would appear without warning round an island, doing over 20 knots I reckoned. Of course it is up to the world to get out of their way as they were under sail and we had a few alarming moments. We moored to an isolated pontoon at Loctudy on Isle du Moines. The sun had come out and we went ashore. Charming place, lovely walking and a few shops.

Monday 29th May – Port Crouesty to Vannes

We left Isle du Moines at 08:30 and made our way up the twisting river towards Vannes. We moored to the waiting pontoon until the swing bridge opened and the harbour master shouted a berth number to us as we went through. When we got to the marina that berth was taken so we squeezed into another. He arrived later and was quite happy, admitting he'd given us a wrong number.

Vannes is stunning and well worth the visit. A Roman city with much of the medieval walls and buildings intact. Little winding cobbled streets and very French.

Later we took the 'little train' and saw even more of it. The little trains at €5 each are in most towns and good value.

At evening high tide we saw coming up the canal nine 42 foot yachts from some charity for the disabled. All had wheelchairs stacked and lashed around the decks and many disabled people on board. This is big business now. In the middle of the convoy came a trawler type boat towing a 40 foot power boat which seemed to have lost its power.

The chaos as the boat with the tow got mixed up with the disabled in the pool at the head of the river was amazing. To add to it the 'vent solaire' blowing. Women threw endless ropes which just fell in the water. Fenders were hung too high for the low pontoons, so sides were scratched. The skipper of the towing vessel, losing patience with his crew's total inability to get a rope ashore, rushed down from his flybridge position and leaped ashore. It was a good 4 feet gap and the pontoon was much lower. He landed with a crash, grabbed a rope and, yelling for assistance, started to haul in the boat. No turns around a cleat, in fact no cleats, just rings in the French fashion. The harbour master had joined in the fun and was now was now lying flat on his considerable stomach trying to reach multiple ropes thrown optimistically in the water by charity boats, someone holding his feet. The disabled looked passively on. I tried hard to keep a straight face. In the end all was sorted out. The French just cheerfully bash into you, so put lots of fenders out! They have all sorts of qualifications required to take a boat to sea, unlike the Brits. However their competence is highly questionable.

We were woken in the night by a loud thump in the boat. Elisha cried out and I leapt up to discover a black cat in the cabin. We think it had stepped on the curtain that covers the cabin hatch to keep flies out and the door was open underneath it so it had fallen into the cabin wrapped in the curtain. It left at maximum speed leaping to the bank and off into the dark.

We left on the tide at 08:30 the next day and coasted down the winding river and out into the gulf again. We trickled through the islands and stopped at a beach on Ile d'Artz. We pinched a mooring buoy and rowed ashore with steak and a barbecue. Not a soul in sight. We drank our cold beer and ate the steak but the tide was dropping and I knew we would ground by 14:00 so we didn't stay too long.

Tuesday 30th May - Vannes to Port Crouesty

Back to Port Crouesty again for the lift out. The following morning we were at the boat lift at 08:00. By 09:00 there were three boats circling like sharks waiting to be first in. But I had nipped up and agreed 09:00 with Monsieur Harbour Master and he waved away the others who, foiled, backed off gnashing their French teeth and in we went.

Once out Monsieur Bulot, the Volvo agent was waiting for us and introduced himself and shook hands. A lad hosed down the boat with a very powerful petrol motor driven unit and seemed to want to strip off the anti foul, leaving bare patches especially where I had added a couple of inches at the water line. It became clear to me that he had not seen a Duoprop outdrive before, rare here, and he went off to find anodes and the necessary tools. I had told them I had spare anodes and the tools so impatiently I took the props off and replaced the anodes myself.

We got the boat back in the water the same day to my delight. When the boat was put back in we moored up on the waiting pontoon just to hose the grit off the deck



Auray - No Change in 500 Years

and tidy up inside. While we were doing this there was a crash - a French yacht had bumped into us. The crash was his pulpit hitting our guard rails and scraping down our side. Once again only one person aboard. Again he had no fenders out (fortunately we had). His outboard wouldn't work it seemed and as usual we got French shrugs. I think he was asking us to come and tow him in but by this time I was getting just a bit fed up by being bumped by out of control inadequately crewed French yachts (every boat that had bumped us so far has been a yacht) and ignored him. He went drifting gently down the river in no danger making helpless gestures. The harbour launch came out to deal with him.

Wednesday 31st May - Port Crouesty to Auray

We had thought about missing out Auray. It meant back to the Gulf of Morbihan and up another quite long river. But we decided to go. A long trudge up the river after waiting for the tide in Port Navalo. The river narrowed and shallowed. But when we arrived it was all worthwhile. A little gem of a place with a medieval bridge and square, timbered buildings and cobbled alleys.

Not a town like Vannes but a small quiet place. We treated ourselves to a proper dinner of duck and salmon and I tried a half bottle of a local wine I had not heard of. It was an excellent light red, only 10% alcohol and served chilled! I must try and get some for the boat. We moored up to visitors' moorings in the river. A still night with not a sound and few people about.

Thursday 1st June – Auray to River Vilaine and La Roche Bernard

We regretfully left on the tide at 11:30, later than planned but Elisha went for a walk and got lost. I saw a small figure in the distance running madly, as she was conscious of the falling tide, and went to pick her up in the dinghy.

A 55 foot British Flybridge powerboat came up river at HW but turned round and left, too big for the moorings I guess. People with big boats seem to just ignore pilot books telling them of length restrictions, heedless of the problems they cause.



The Magnificent Bay of Treach'er Gourhed on Ile

I met a Brit who kept his boat in the river and spent his summers there. It was a red yacht about 3 miles down in a deserted cove. He asked me where I kept the boat and when I said Lymington he said. "Oh well I'll walk with you because you must be a wealthy man." When I explained I only had a river mooring he was quite disappointed.

We left Morbihan and headed for Ile Houat and the promised beaches. We found a stunning sandy bay at Treach' er Gourhed with not a soul on it. No other boats at anchor. Crystal clear water.

We went ashore and barbecued salmon and drank a bottle of cold champagne, one of several kindly donated by Anne-Marie for the ships stores. It was the first of June

and seemed like a good idea. Later another couple of yachts anchored, but far from us.

What this is like in August I don't know but we found the whole area just beautiful. We will go back and spend longer there some day. We called in at the tiny harbour at Ile Hoedic but no room so we came on to the River Villaine and through the lock in the barrage up to La Roche Bernard.

A long slow haul up the river over the shallow silting twisting lower reaches to the lock at the barrage and then along the beautiful still water of the river, the banks tree lined and rocky. We saw one house, it looked like an old church, in a hollow with rocky pine covered slopes around and it's own little jetty with a boat. Paradise, a sort of Camusglashlan (our croft in Scotland) with no visible roads.

As we approached La Roche Bernard we saw the rock. A huge and obvious ridge of rock jutting into the river. Apparently the Viking Bernard (his name means 'strong as a bear') sailed up the river with his followers, saw the rock and liked it. A little harbour by the rock for his ships, a palisade on top, acknowledgement of suzerainty of the local Duke and Bernard was settled on his rock.

Another stunning little place, marred I felt, by illustrations of the guillotine at work in the square. Why are the French so proud of their revolution? Such an awful bloodletting. A nice pontoon with water and power. I liked the 'supermarket trolley' approach to using a dinghy. Put in a Euro and get it back when you bring the dinghy back and clip in the mooring strap!



Champagne at Treach' er Gourhed



Through the Lock on Villaine River

Saturday 3rd June – La Roche Bernard to Piriac Sur Mer

We left after lazing a day away and down through the lock, crowded as it was Saturday and 'Le Weekend'.

Predictably chaotic but we learn and were defended by a wall of fenders so were able to smile and 'pas problem monsieur' as they crashed into us.

On to Piriac sur Mer. Through the tidal gate into the marina. Yet another charming little place with superb beaches. We watched a wedding in the church with all the song sheets, bridesmaids and pages dresses co-ordinated in a blue and white pattern. One page of about six was very unhappy about being dressed so similarly to the girls and I watched sympathetically as he battled tearfully with his mother.

We had a beer on the waterfront and they all came out to be photographed. Elisha was fascinated by the hats and dresses and everybody was very happy.

There was a tidal gate, a sort of metal guillotine which rose from the sea bed as the tide dropped to hold the water in the marina pool. However there was a period when the flooding tide covered the gate but there was not yet sufficient depth so the top of the barrier was just under water. A red light that the entrance was not yet safe. This failed to impress yachties though who seemed determined to ram it, desperate to get out I suppose, and the harbour master tore around in his rib trying to warn them off each time. Very entertaining.



A Wedding at Piriac sur Mer



My Birthday in Pornic Escaping the Crowds. Note Smart Birthday Shirt!

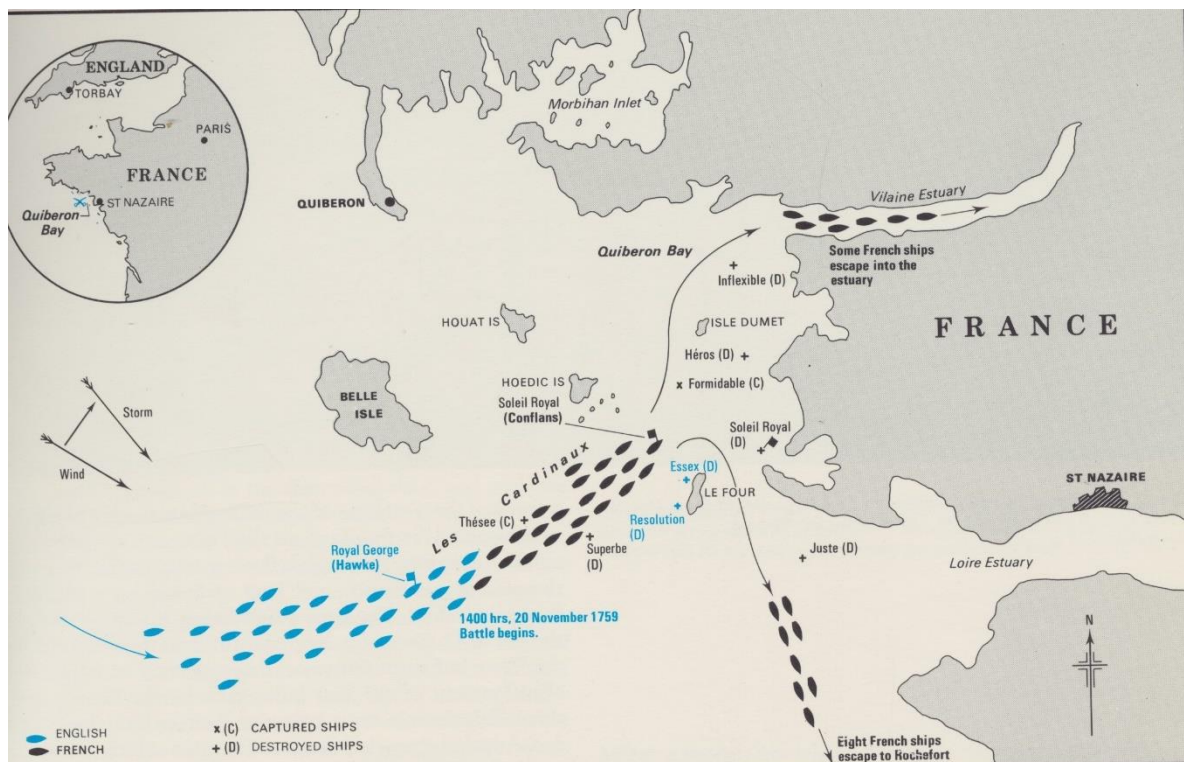
NOVEMBER 1759 – HISTORICAL NOTE: The Battle of Quiberon Bay

This was the time of the 'Seven Years War' with France, which came shortly after 'The War of Jenkin's Ear'. The French Admiral Conflans found himself on a lee shore with the wind blowing hard NNW and heavy seas.

A superior British Fleet under Admiral Hawke was bearing down on him. The wind came round to NW. Admiral Conflans decided to run for it and lead his squadron into Quiberon Bay, trusting and believing that Hawke would not dare to follow, under the conditions of the weather, into a bay which French authorities describe as ‘*containing banks and shoals, and lined with reefs which the navigator rarely sees without fright and never passes without emotion*’. It was in the midst of these ghastly dangers that forty-four large sailing ships were about to engage in desperate confusion; for the space was too restricted for fleet manoeuvres. Admiral Conflans flattered himself he would get in first and be able to haul up close to the shore, forcing the British, if they foolishly followed, to take up position six miles to leeward. None of his expectations were fulfilled. The British followed close behind. This placed the admiral foremost in the flight which greatly damaged his reputation.

Admiral Hawke was not in the least deterred by the dangers before him, whose full extent he entirely realised. He reasoned that the French fleeing before him would serve partially as pilots and must take ground before him. One French seventy four, closely pressed and outnumbered, ventured to open her lower deck ports; the sea swept in carried her down with all on board but twenty men.

The foregoing is an edited extract from American Admiral Alfred Mahan’s superb ‘The Influence of Sea Power on History’. My emotions on navigating these hazards and imagining two great fleets fighting amongst them in an on-shore gale can be imagined. It’s one thing reading of events. Entirely another to be there and see it all in the mind’s eye.



The Battle of Quiberon Bay

Sunday 4th June - Piriac Sur Mer to Pornic

On from Piriac to Pornic having decided to miss out St Nazaire whose only attraction appeared to be the submarine pens and I felt I’d had enough German concrete. Anyway bet they were closed.

Sunday 4th June today and my birthday, I forget which one. Sun shining strongly and last night’s ‘vent solaire’ of course gone.

Pornic was a disappointment. A very busy holiday town with expensive marina and dirty toilets with no paper. We walked the busy streets and took a useless mini train ride. Nice beaches but packed.

We did had a very nice dinner at a beach restaurant. Staff rushing about like mad and no time for pleasantries but nice place and food fine.

I got a really nice dark blue tea shirt from Annabel and Emily, a shirt from Elisha and a couple of super bottles of wine, one from Anne-Marie. Fuelled up.

We left Pornic and skirted the top of Ile Normentier and down to Port Joinville in Ile d'Yeu.

Monday 5th June - Pornic to Ile de Yeu

A beautiful run in smooth sea. We loved the Ile d'Yeu. A secure friendly marina, when you found your way in, though a bit of a walk from the town.

There we and met Mike, who kept his boat in Camaret, and Pauline and Phil on Willwind of Moss who we had met in Le Crouesty, and had drinks with both. We walked across the island and along the coast and idled away a couple of hours with cold beers in a little bar waiting for the bus back to Joinville.



**Approaching the Harbour at Normentier,
Ile d'Yeu**



**Pauline and Phil once more.
We were all going the same way.**



**Elisha delighted to find a Renault 4L.
The car that carried our children for years**

We examined the forgotten 'Citadel'. No great battles here but quite a powerful little fort with a good single ditch incorporating a very good example of a water filled 'Ha Ha'. Nasty thing looking so insignificant. About 10 feet in from the outer face,

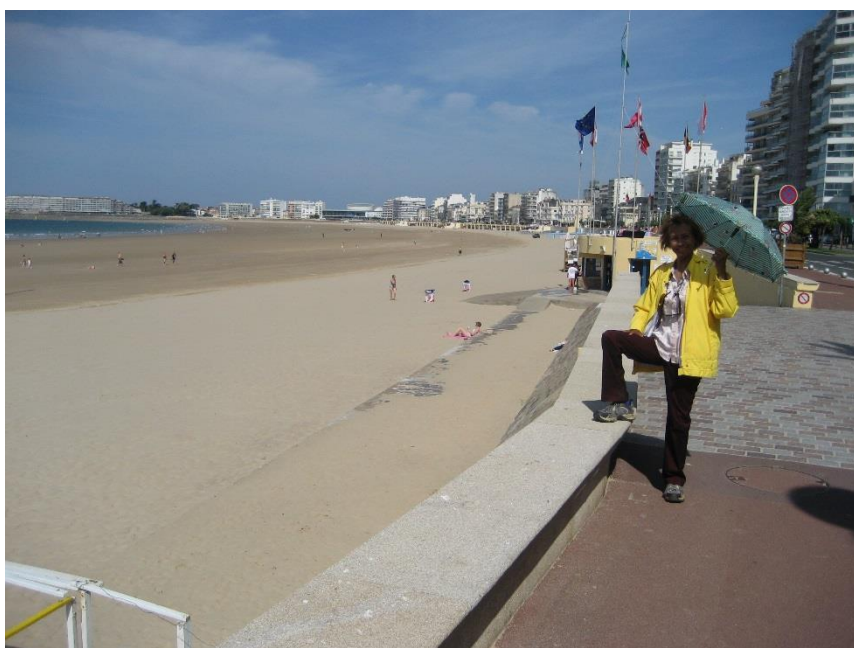
about 4 across with rough stone sides and about 4/5 deep with a foot of water in it. Just right to break the leg of a soldier charging through shallow water.

Lots of neglected little white cottages, I wonder how much they are?

Wednesday 7th June - Ile de Yeu to Sable d'Olonnes

We left next day for Sable d'Olonnes in the Vendee. Forecast ENE F3. I think it was top end or F4 and sea rougher than expected. Lurching about in the swell just clear of the Ile de Yeu harbour entrance and anxiously watching a sailboarder coming right at us with the sun in my eyes reflecting off the waves I ran over a pot float. I saw it coming at the last minute and we were in neutral when we hit it but it was two floats roped together, one red the other black. It became evident it was not going to come free and it was too rough to start trying to get them free by leaning over the bathing platform. I could see that it was rope having pulled one buoy in with the boat hook. We had not much depth and the were being blown towards the quite close lee shore. In the end I just went ahead and the engines cut the rope. I wondered if we were towing a float but no. I'll check for remnants later.

We could only make 16 knots comfortably against the sea until we were very close to the land for shelter. Came in to Sable d'Olonnes which looked like a big holiday town with lots of beaches. A long entrance between sea walls which came right out, and up river to the huge marina. We were allocated a place by the Captiniare and squeezed in. A long way back into town and not worth getting there when you arrived!



The Nice Side of Sable d'Olonnes

Returned tired and ate a cold chicken on the boat.

Forecast for Thursday for La Rochelle is ENE F3 here but ENE F6 for La Rochelle 40nm away! Thinking about it.

OK we decided not to go and discovered the real town of Sable d'Olonne on the other side of the river and it is charming with old, car free, cobbled streets and little shops. We had a lovely lunch overlooking a super beach. I eat my words. A nice place after all.

Brit boat on next finger, 'Frantasia', and met Anne and Richard who came over for a drink. They keep their boat in Villaine River. They were heading south too but so charmed with this whole area they have had the boat here 5 years. Spend 4 months a year on the boat. Lovely people, as usual astonishing ignorant about power boats. 'I suppose you'll have to wait weeks for a dead calm sea before going on', said Richard. When he realised we had come over from Ile d'Yeu same day they had he was astonished. He too had miscalculated the amount of sea and the short sharp waves had given them a miserable journey. He said they kept taking way right off his boat, a Moody 35. Anne was a lovely lady who quizzed Elisha as to whether she ever got to eat in a restaurant. Elisha said we often ate in a restaurant. Anne said she never

did because Richard said her cooking on the boat was so good. It ended up Richard having to faithfully promise to take her out to dinner.

Forecast E F4 this morning easing to E F3 after lunch so I think we'll head for La Rochelle then, the Vieux Port I think with it's classic twin towers guarding the entrance. I'm told they have the best and most exciting market on the French Atlantic coast.

I find agreement that Brittany is not France, that the Bretons are not, nor see themselves as, French and that the Bretons are particularly friendly to Brits, especially Celts. Ulli tells me that only now are we moving into French France!

French France

Friday 9th June - Sable d'Olonne to La Rochelle

By mid afternoon the wind was still very strong, true I think the underlying wind could have been as low as F3 but the gusts to F6 were frequent and felt very strong with all the rigging on the yachts shrieking in the marina. Yet the sea state was now forecast as slight! Seemed unlikely. We decided to go for Bourgenay only 5 nm down the coast to see what it was like and a change of scenery. In fact once out it was fine, F3 although wind on nose. 'Why don't we just carry on to La Rochelle?' Said Elisha. So we did and had a good run with no problems, down the channel between the mainland and Ile de Re, under the towering bridge to the island and into the river mouth.

We started up river to the old town but the channel is narrow, the tide was low and I was not sure we would get a berth, so we went into Minimes, a gigantic artificial marina at the river mouth. We moored up to a hammerhead with a little difficulty due to being blown strongly off and a Brit yacht, Wanda, which was rafted three boats out, having her bow shore line diagonally right across the remaining space. In the end I had to reverse into the wind and Elisha lassoed the cleat and we came in against his rope. For the first time the skipper appeared on Wanda and shouted across. 'I can't move my rope you know, I'm being blown off, try Pontoon 13.' I ignored him and he made no offer to help apparently feeling he had the right to block the only remaining space. When moored up his bow rope ran alongside and under our bow where I felt it would scrape off my anti-foul. Anyway I checked in at the captiniere and was told I was fine where I was and there were no other spaces. The skipper of Wanda had gone ashore when I got back and I moved his bow line to another cleat and there was no problem with it at all. I wondered if he would come and complain but when he returned, much later, he pointedly ignored us. I found a series on UTUBE later about restoring 'Wanda' and I think it was the same boat. Possibly it was his pride and joy so I won't judge him too harshly.

I had very bad hay fever when I went to the Captiniere, the biggest, grandest and smartest office yet. Feeling tired and not well with my eyes red and running and my nose red and dripping my French escaped me and I asked if the guy spoke any English. 'Non'. He said pointedly. The boss at another desk got up and came across. 'In France you must speak French'. He said sternly. "I speak English but I will only speak it if you speak French to me. What is it you want." I searched my brain and asked for a berth in French. He asked where the boat was and I explained though struggled with the French for a Hammerhead, or T piece. It seems it is Terminee



Tucked in in Front of yacht Wanda at Minimes Marina



The Marvellous Twin Towers Guarding The entrance to La Rochelle

which is logical. We concluded the business with a final. “In France you must speak French.” Fair enough, but in Brittany this would not have happened, we are in French France for sure.

Lots of Brit yachties about. One came to see us and he kept his boat in Royan which he recommended over the new marina on the other side of the Gironne.

We took the water bus up to La Rochelle, through the towers. A magical place with much of the old city remaining. We loved it. We strolled the old streets, bought Elisha a white jacket, watched a very up market wedding reception in the old palace of Henry II, ate lunch and enjoyed ourselves. Elisha had suggested that cold beer made my hay fever worse so I abandoned it and drank coffee and wine – and she was right, much better and my poor swollen nose, assaulted by endless blowing and hot sun, is back to nearly its former self.

We saw an enormous Sunseeker, must have been eighty feet, being assiduously cleaned by the four crew, at least a couple of million! We think they were delivering it to a new owner.

Sunday 11th June – La Rochelle to St Martins, Ile de Re

We left for St Martins on Ile de Re where we were due to meet up with Mike and Ulli, my co-director and accountant respectively. Mike had flown from Southampton to La Rochelle but Ulli lives in France anyway and was only a couple of hours drive away. The idea was to have, seriously, a Board Meeting and sign off some papers.

St Martins is apparently very ‘chic’ with lots of Parisian visitors. Having read hairy stories of hundreds of boats fighting their way into the little harbour I thought we would make sure of being comfortably sorted out when Mike and Ulli came on Tuesday 13th June. On the way we anchored in a crowded bay on Ile de Re opposite La Rochelle river mouth. I thought we might swim. No chance, the water was filthy with visible sewage in patches with people splashing about in it! Not us.



Comfortable in St Martins, Ile de Re



The Board Meeting. Mike Ulli and Robert

We moved hastily on and arrived off St Martins, checked the tide and went slowly in. The central town is surrounded by a 'moat' of the sea. In one place a solid stone causeway blocks the water. As you enter the harbour the local boats and fishing boats are ahead of you and the area dries out to mud. A lock gate has been fitted so that part of the circle of sea can be held in to maintain a depth of about 2m and this is used by yachties. A sharp turn to starboard takes you through the swing bridge/lock and into the pontoons. A Frenchman at the bridge shouted to us to berth in 202 which seemed very efficient so we potted up till we found it and reversed in. Delighted to be so easily in and secure we went ashore for a beer and look around. A charming little place with a covered market, back alleys galore and lots of expensive clothes. Three or four British boats but mostly they were French. I went to the Captiniare to pay but he amiably waved me away, we should pay when we left, stay as long as we like. When we left I found out there was method in this, being presented with an alarming bill! Robbery and far the highest we ever paid with poor facilities and water shortage. But it's 'chic' and Parisians come!

It turned out there was a washing machine and dryer so we put some clothes in – but they closed access for 2 hours for lunch so we, even with the code, were stuck.

The whole town was fortified and is largely preserved. Incorporated in the walls is a large Citadel with impressive ditching and a little harbour of its own. I wanted to visit but it turns out it is a prison for 'lifers' and no access. I walked around and the masonry of the walls is crumbling. The French are, or were, very fond of using old castles and forts as prisons. We are very short of prisons in UK. What about Hurst Castle and the Solent Sea Forts as prisons?

There are beaches near St Martins but not clean enough to tempt us. I imagine the west side is cleaner.

On Tuesday I put up the sun awning and the extra cockpit table so that we were ready for the Board Meeting. At about 10:00 Mike and Ulli arrived and we served

coffee. We had a serious meeting lasting to about 12:30 and then Elisha came back and we went off to lunch at Ulli's favourite restaurant. Scallops all round and very pleasant. It was generally agreed that board meetings should be held away from the day to day issues of the company, to take a dispassionate and overall view, and that Gibraltar would be ideal for the next one.



The Board Meeting. Mike Ulli and Robert

Wednesday 14th June – St Martins, Ile de Re to Royan

Next morning we had to be out before they shut the gates at 09:45, so Mike came round for a quick coffee and we set off for Royan.

I would have liked to visit Rochefort which every one says is marvellous but felt we must get on having taken so much time in northern France. Besides I was getting a little tired of muddy water and Rochefort is miles up a twisty river and a tidal gate means you need to get the timings right. The other factor was that, having come out of Rochefort we would have to come north to round the north end of Ile d'Oleron before once again heading south.

Looking at the map the logical way is to go south through the channel between southern Ile d'Oleron and the mainland, the Pertuis de Maumusson. Trouble is all the pilot books agreed it was dangerous. One account said if you must do it go on a calm day, prepare for a heavy sea, follow a local fishing boat with a known deep draught, and pray. This did not sound good but I do think sometimes the pilot books exaggerate and talk of worst case. However the accounts of the shallow shifting sand bar with markers not yet re-positioned so in the wrong place and breaking turbulent seas persuaded me reluctantly to discount the passage.

In La Rochelle the yachting who kept his boat in Royan had confirmed my decision. I asked him, being local, if he had been through. He told me once. He had sailed for 30 years and never been so frightened. He had picked the right tide and a calm day and checked depths. One moment he said the water was calm, some breakers to the

sides, then quite suddenly it ‘erupted’. Huge swell appeared coupled with overfalls and the sea just ‘boiled’. Depths which had been 7m suddenly rose to 12 and sank to 2m. The boat was barely controllable and a flood of tide raced them along. He felt glad to have survived it. Point made I thought. Round the north of Ile d’Oleron it is.

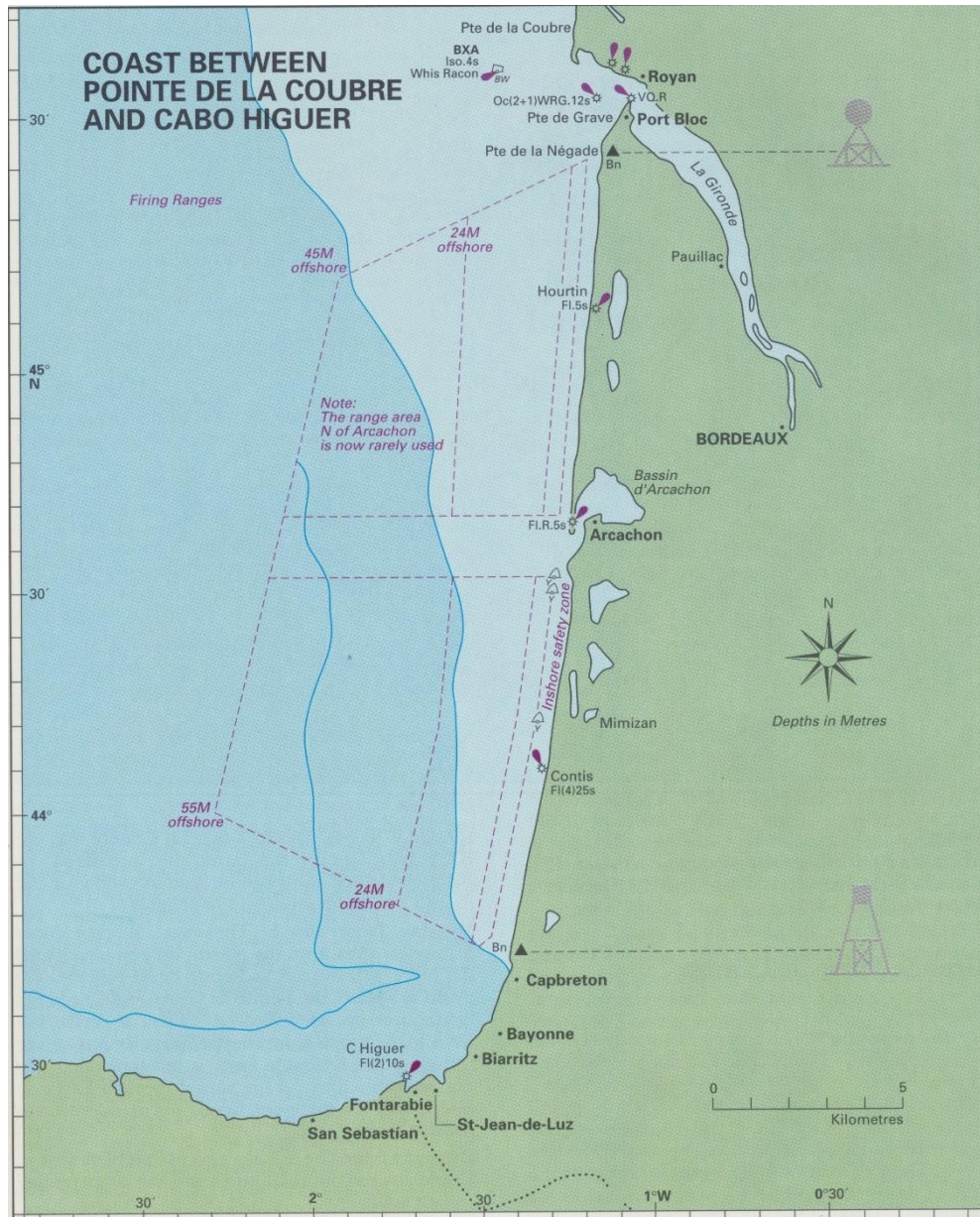
Thursday 15th June - Royan to Arachon

So we left St Martins and ran back through the bridge and west to the tip of d’Oleron outside the rocky shoals that reach out for you. It was flat calm till the shoals when a heavy swell appeared which we crashed through. But it rapidly fell off and we turned south to run to the Gironde entrance in flat water. Total distance to Royan was 60nm so we were very relaxed. In spite of warnings from the Royan yachtie I thought I could save a little distance by cutting inside the outer channel marked, which is a very long way out. As we got close, quite suddenly we became aware that we were heading for a white wall of breakers. Hasty re-think and diverted to outer buoy. It’s really much easier amongst the rocks of Brittany, less surprises! The rocks stay put. I was to discover just how treacherous the sandy coast we were moving onto can be.

Up the channel to Royan and into port, only just enough water. Once in moored up OK and looked around. Not impressed. Dirty harbour, floating logs of wood. Unhelpful Captiniare. Long walk to town, showers about half mile away on other side of harbour.

Apparently we flattened Royan when we were liberating France in World War II, so it is all modern flats and holiday shops, though why you would wish to go there for a holiday beats me. I suppose it wasn’t much fun being liberated by the allies.

In spite of all my efforts I could not get proper information on the naval firing area which stretches 50nm out to sea between here and Cap Breton. The girl in the Captiniare said the range was closed next day after 12:30 so we could go in the morning, but I was not convinced she really knew, or cared. Elisha had strong opinions about being fired on by French warships. My Brit Imray pilot books states ‘There is an air to air, air to sea, sea to sea and land to sea firing range which extends 55 miles offshore but it is usually (!) safe up to 3 miles offshore’. But the girl denied this and the unhelpful, leaflet from the Military did not show any such inshore zone on its map. All advice is to ring the military number. It had an Automated Attendant, in French which I could not understand, asking ‘tappez un pour ????, tapez deux pour ????, etc.



Cave Dwellings in the Gironne



A Long Run Down the Coast to Arachon



Capbreton



**Capbreton to St Jean de Lutz
– It's a Hard Life**

I asked a French yachtie who gave the classic French, 'c'est un probleme' with a shrug. I asked him about the inshore 3nm safety limit. He said he was not sure but anyway it was dangerous inshore because of the swell. The run to the next port was 60 nm of exposed sandy shore with no haven of any kind yet nobody I spoke to had ever done it!

Next day we did not fill up with fuel as I was coming to the conclusion that always having 700 lt of diesel to carry was unnecessary, we had last filled up at La Rochelle.

So we left at 09:30 and went up the Gironne a bit to see the cave dwellings (apparently a saint lived in a cave in the cliffs and pilgrims who came for an audience had to wait weeks or months (and find themselves another cave to live in). Then Talmont, a little medieval church on a spit of land. I don't doubt the River Gironde all the way 30nm up to Bordeaux is fascinating, but also very muddy and not for us this time.

The run to Arachon is 60nm from the south east lip of the Gironne. It is dead straight and nothing but sand. No shelter or refuge and no certainty of getting into Arachon. However the sea was smooth, the sun shone and there was no swell. We cruised at 25 knots past the endless sand seeing only one yacht the entire way. Did they know something we didn't? Elisha kept a sharp look out for French missiles (land to sea). A couple of military aircraft screamed overhead but we were left alone on the empty sea keeping a mile offshore.

You are advised to enter Arachon HW +/- one hour. However having left Royan at HW + 3, even having stopped for lunch, we had a problem with HW Arachon being about 21:00. The chart showed enough water so we entered about HW -3 hrs. Perhaps a mistake. It seemed reasonable and at the outer clear water buoy all was fine. Turned for the channel which runs for 5nm before the sheltering cape, then another 5 nm to the marina in the Bassin d'Arachon.

We entered the approach channel in hazy conditions while still out of sight of land. I know they say in the pilot book that the sand bars and channels constantly shift, and that the markers are only moved annually so may not be in the right place, and that the charted channels are therefore only as they were when the last survey was done, but the full import had failed to get to me. As the tide flows in it creates swell and breaks to an astonishing degree on the shifting banks on either side of the channel. Enough water, in theory, but as we were, in perfectly calm conditions, being heaved up and down one to one and a half meters it looked very different. According to the chart plotter we were aground on a bank 1/4 mile away so for the first time both the chart plotter, and chart, were pretty useless! In the slight haze we strained our eyes for the next buoy and prayed we were not missing one out as the channel twisted abominably. I was acutely conscious that the 'buoys are only re-laid annually'. The

foaming crest of the breakers leapt up high in the air, the water flung us around, and nothing, no land to see, but breakers on either side. And this in flat calm conditions. Elisha was unable to believe that, as we followed the markers which apparently aimed us into a surf wall until the next turn, that we were doing the right thing. She was very focussed on marker spotting. Now I believe the pilot book that in any swell, or onshore wind, entrance is impossible and understand why fishing boats divert to La Rochelle 65 miles away!

Chastened, stirred and a little shaken we got into the shelter of the cape and planed the final 5nm to the marina, we had taken a long time over the 5nm entrance as I had not dared do more than 6 knots.

I don't want to exaggerate the entrance and I'm sure we were not in danger but I really do prefer rocks, at least you know where they are! Apparently they lose about 4 boats a year in this channel and I can see why. I have looked at a little movie film I took of coming in. It doesn't look so bad. Reading what I have written it now seems exaggerated, but that was how it seemed to us at the time.

Few yachties visit Arachon. A 12/15 hour voyage at sailing speeds, shallow entrance, no refuge if swell gets up – I do see why. And Arachon is not interested in visitors. It is a self contained, crowded boating community in the huge inner bay, and the local industry is oysters. The marina has a 20 year waiting list and no 'Visiteurs'. We rafted alongside an old motor cruiser on a hammerhead and I went up to the Captiniare. The Captain it seemed spoke no English but watched suspiciously as his girl and I talked in French. She kept referring to him in fast French I couldn't follow, and each time he shrugged. In the end it was agreed we could stay on there for 2 nights for €38, showers extra. I said one night would do, but another shrug, still €38.

Next day we walked up town, which is miles and nothing much except nice, and clean, beaches. We had planned to take a ferry to explore the Bassin but it was overcast and when we wandered along at 12:00 they were all at lunch till 14:30, so we didn't bother. That night a squall produced sudden strong wind, sheet lightening and a downpour. I jumped up, closed the cabin hatch and got soaked putting on springs and extra fenders. We watched the sky lighting up for a bit, had a Scotch and went back to sleep.

Next morning I was determined to leave at HW, Elisha was worried about more squalls and another trip through the entrance. The next stop is Cap Breton after yet another staggering 65nm of nothing but sand. We had half tanks of fuel but I thought another 200 litres would be re-assuring. So went to fuel berth. Like many French ones it is credit card operated. I know that they will not take UK credit cards so set off to Captiniare by dinghy as no way out of locked gates and he some way away. Same girl, same scene, my credit cards would definitely work. Back to pumps, no they don't, back to Captiniare. Shrugs. The French have perfected the shrug. The girl told me that at 11:00 someone would be there and we could pay cash, we could not pay at the Captiniare. 11:00 would mean we miss the tide! I asked girl if the other entrance, the 'Passe du Sud' was closed as I had read that it had silted up. Suddenly the Captain came to life. "It is closed," he said, "and dangerous, you must not go". So the old bastard spoke English after all!

I went back to the fuel pontoon where an English speaking French lady, fuelling her boat, talked to us. I explained the problem. She shrugged. 'It is France'. She said. So we left anyway to catch the tide, and I hoped I was not cutting fuel too tight.

As we cleared the marina a French military looking patrol boat approached marked 'Affaires Maritime'. They waved us down and boarded us asking to see my 'accreditation'. Brits do not need an ICC² as it not a legal requirement in U.K. I had my ICC, it lasts for five years. It is a legal requirement in France and has to be renewed annually. I showed it to them. It was valid 2003 to 2008 but it worried them. In France you need a new license every year. A debate took place on the regulations.

² International Certificate of Competence.

In the end they accepted our ICC and we parted with much handshaking. I explained we were heading for Gibraltar. They looked at each other and then wished us 'Bonne Chance à vous'. I didn't much like the 'chance' bit!

The French must spend a fortune on policing. In Arachon we saw the following official vessels:-

- Affairs Maritime
- Gendarmerie
- Douanes (Customs)
- Harbour Patrol
- French Naval

Saturday 17th June – Arachon to Cap Breton

We had a good run down the coast to Capbreton, the next harbour with no other vessel to be seen at sea. The entrance was sloppy with swell but OK and really friendly. Visitors berths were straight ahead of the entry. The Captiniere was very welcoming and gave us a present of a key penknife, a bottle of wine and a pack of literature. What a change from Arachon.

We liked Capbreton. Super beaches, the water is clean and you can get Spanish food, a welcome change. Lovely canal up to a lake with fresh clean water and beaches in the lake with restaurants. Holiday homes, but they look nice and fit in.

We met an English guy, Steve, sailing single handed in a 10m Westerly from Ibiza to England. He is finding it wearing and dangerous at night. Also says 90% of the way is at 5 knots with the engine into the prevailing wind and swell and no sailing. He swears that, since he is reduced to being an unsatisfactory motor boat, he might as well get a proper one that can do 10 knots.

Steve came round with a bottle of wine and shared our steak on the barbecue. He is 38 and had 15 years in the army in logistics mostly with the RAF dropping supplies. He has been wounded several times and to this day texts his mother daily to say he is OK. A really nice guy and glad of the opportunity to chat I think. He has sort of fallen into the single handed mode finding it difficult to get crew who he could rely on to stay awake at night. Various friends who offered to crew for parts of the southern voyage had proved unreliable. A man and wife couple were the last straw for Steve. Twice he found the 'on watch' crew sound asleep in the cockpit at night while on passage while he slept. He remonstrated which they took sulkily. Then a third time he found the watch asleep and, keen to make his point, got out his compressed air foghorn and blew it in their ears. He was army trained and disciplined and just couldn't understand. They required about half an hour to recover from the shock and regain some hearing. They left at the next port and are sadly no longer friends of Steve's.

He had sold his flat in England bought the boat and set off finding civilian life unfulfilling. We swapped notes as he could tell us about the Spanish and Portuguese coasts and we could tell him about the Biscay north coast as he had gone straight across the Bay of Biscay going out so it was new to him.

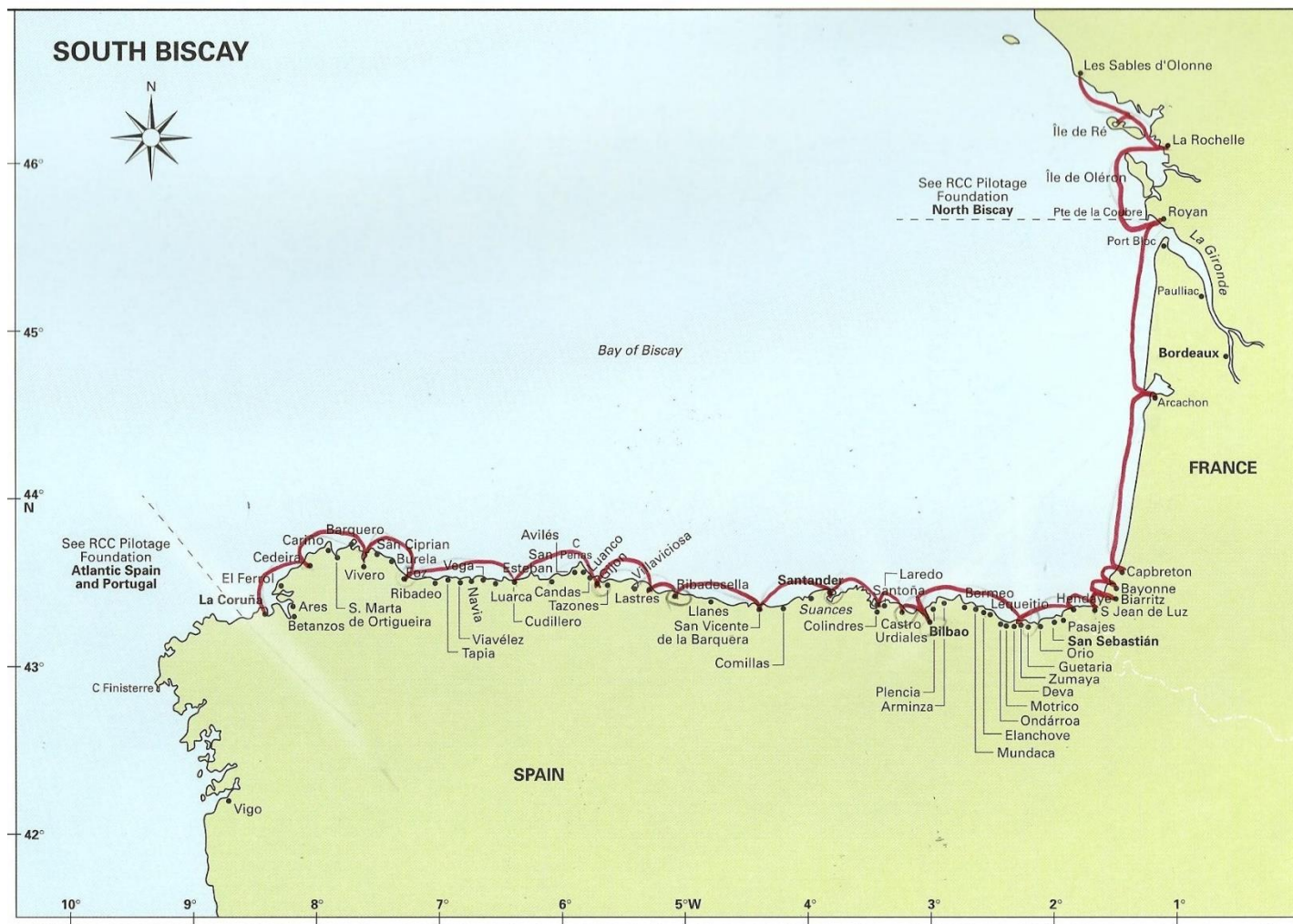
Monday 19th June – Cap Breton to St Jean de Luz

We left for St Jean de Luz and Spain that day. St Jean de Lutz is still in France but Basque, and distinctively so. A tiny marina where we were squeezed in under the shouts of an excited Harbourmaster who thought we were really too big at 10 metres for his harbour and a walk across the bridge to the town. Lovely old streets, shops and restaurants. Excellent Basque food and all very friendly.

It was a bit cold and wet but the Basque beer was good. We wanted to explore the area and take the little train up to the mountain top of La Rhune, but the prevailing poor visibility that was to dog us along the north Spanish coast had arrived and there was no point mountain climbing in mist. A pity as the views are superb (we went

there later on) and it is these towering mountains that a series of battles were fought in the Peninsular War in 1814 as France tried, unsuccessfully, to defend her frontiers against Wellington.

Chapter 4 – North Coast of Spain



Tuesday 20th June – St Jean de Luz to Zumara

We filled up to half tank on diesel hoping Steve has it right and it is cheaper in Spain. An easy run just round the point to Hendaye to the new Spanish Marina at Fuentarrabia on the other side where there was not a soul to be seen but card operated Spanish pumps. We tried them and my card worked. This took us to about $\frac{3}{4}$ tank.

On to Zumara passing sadly San Sebastian, site of a great siege by the British in the Napoleonic wars. There is nothing left of the fortifications but the bay is interesting though without facilities for local boats.

The entrance to Zumara was fine but we were glad the swell was low. The new marina was half built and they were madly working on the rest. Miles to walk to town as you had to walk up river to the bridge and back again down the other



Just Building the Marina at Zumara

side. So we just took dinghy across and the river and it was easy. Not a word of English was spoken but we managed.

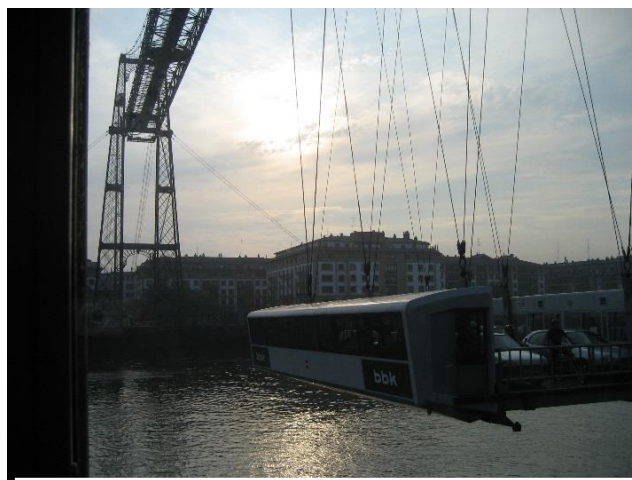
Wednesday 21st June – Zumara to Bilbao

Next day we went on to Bilbao. The coast was lovely and the mist lighter but lots of rubbish in the clean water. Thirty minutes out of Zumara there was a heavy ‘thump’ and the engine note changed and then picked up. I stopped the engines, tilted up the outdrives and put the dingy down. I clipped on my lifeline, lay on my stomach, and peered over the bathing platform. There was a big thick black plastic rubbish bag round the port prop, still with some contents, plastic bottles etc. I removed it all, checked and ok, so carried on. All along the coast there was floating rubbish.

We entered Bilbao, a huge harbour, and moored up to a pontoon hammerhead at Las Arenas marina linked with the Real Maritimo and Sporting Club. Super pool, cheap beer. We had dinner in Club and fit for Royalty. We were the only ones eating and had table overlooking the harbour.



Dining alone at Real Maritimo in Bilbao



The Weird Old ‘Bridge’ at Bilbao

Sadly we couldn’t stay as they had a Regatta coming so moved to Getxco Marina. A surly captain, and lots of wash from local fishing boats. No shops apart from a little marina store.

Interlude

We had to go back to UK for a week so that I could attend to my business, so we took the ferry home from Bilbao. I was worried about leaving our boat surging up and down in the wash from the local boats so put on more fenders and extra springs.

Although the ferry was just across the harbour we had to get the taxi from the Getxco Marina up to Bilbao, across weird old bridge and back down the other side to the berth.

We’d booked on the P&O Ferry, Pride of Bilbao, to Portsmouth. It did little for Bilbao’s pride. It was shabby and slow and full of fat tattooed people. It seems most of the passengers were on a cut price ‘mini cruise’. This apparently meant you sat watching wide screen television showing football, smoking, drinking beer and shouting. The Pride of Bilbao is now known to have run down the yacht Ouzo off the Isle of Wight at night, drowning the crew.

Wednesday 5th July – Bilbao to Santona

Back to Bilbao. We got back from UK on the ferry at 08:00. To our relief our boat was still there and undamaged. It seemed very calm in Bilbao harbour when we left for

Santona though a WNW F3 forecast. It was much rougher outside than I thought, I had allowed insufficiently for the swell I think.

On this coast wind strength on it's own is of limited value in judging conditions. Normally I would not worry about a F3 on the starboard bow. But if the F3 is opposed to the swell direction it can be quite nasty. And that is before you factor in the tidal current effects.

Into Santona where we nearly ran down a swimmer who was unexpectedly swimming across the harbour entrance channel. A very lumpy night at a mooring buoy.



Leaving Bilbao without regret



A Rough Night on a Santona Mooring

The Yacht Club looked tempting but was closed. The beach was beautiful but too cold to tempt us to swim. Not much to make us want to linger. The next day we left for Santander.

Thursday 6th July Santona to Santander

We had been to Santander by the Brittany Ferry from Portsmouth before and I had studied the narrow channel with interest. So I was looking forward to entering Santander in our own boat. Reeds Almanac showed a little Marina at Barqueria up a small channel to the port side of the main channel, but noted they had no information to offer on it. So we crept up the drying channel and tried to get in.

However locals made it clear this was private and not for visitors, so we had to withdraw. We e-mailed Reeds and got an acknowledgement and an assurance the Almanac would be updated.

In the end the only viable visitors marina is Marina del Cantabrico upriver of Santander. Unfortunately it is a good taxi ride from town, there is no bus, there are no shops for food or milk and it is right beside the airport runway which was frequently used by Ryanair. Very modern office, not that friendly and expensive. The thing to do would have been to anchor in the outer channel but I did need fuel.

Friday 7th July - Santander to San Vicente de la Barquera

We anchored in San Vicente on sand in a clean harbour judging, as best we could, the depth and waited anxiously as the tide dropped but we were alright. A character called John called in his dinghy and chatted. He had been there with his boat anchored in a corner for 3 years and had some sort of arrangement with a local lady, his wife having returned to England tired of voyaging.

We swam from the boat and explored the old town. A music festival celebrating Basque culture with bagpipes, to which Elisha of course danced, meant plaintive Celtic music till the early hours.

Outside the harbour surf thundered on the beach. Sadly modern development is beginning to appear and I suppose in 10 years it will be unrecognisable. On the first day it was clear enough to see snow on the distant Picos mountains.

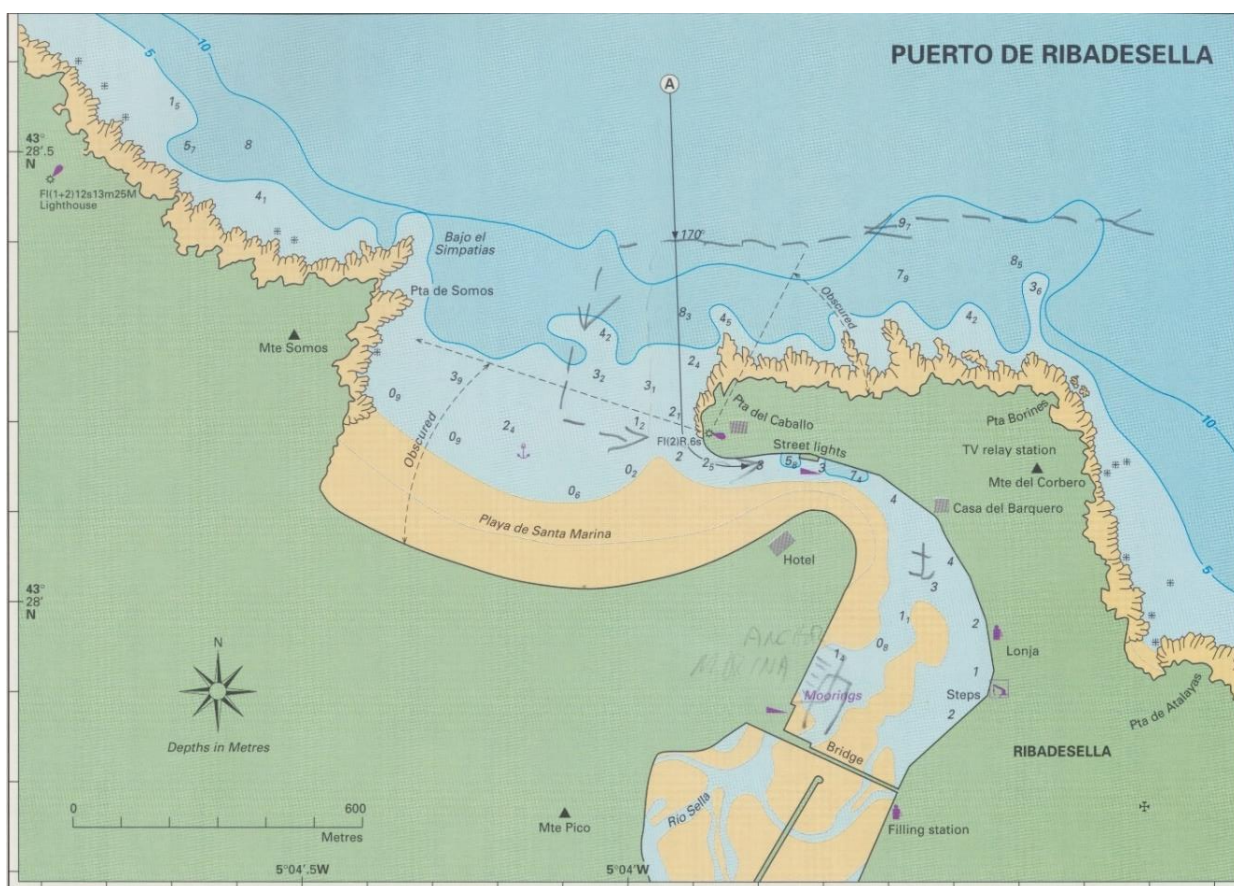
Sunday 9th July - San Vicente de la Barquera - Ribadesella



Anchored in San Vicente de la Barquera



The crew gets time off to relax and swim



Then to Ribadesella. A good easy run. Only a low swell and F2 wind with visibility moderate. You approach from the east rounding a high distinctive headland, Pts de Caballo, and turn 90 degrees to port and turn in towards the beach. So heading due south. We were then heading directly for a long sandy beach on which the white surf thundered. Most unnerving. Just when it seemed all was lost the entrance channel sharp to port, due east, opened up. This was the now a familiar entrance type, parallel to the shore, looking unnavigable at first, to keep the swell out. The tide was low and there was little water.

We looked for a berth in the little marina and after a few shouts and waves moored up to discover it was 'private' but we were welcome. The boats were mostly local fishing boats and the fisherman wandered round curious to see our engines and chat. However the exit gate from the marine was locked and there was no key available; so the dinghy to the pier was the only way out. The electricity did not work but who cares – it was free and friendly.

A lovely town with girls with hoops and boys carrying the virgin in some kind of religious procession in front of the church. A great lunch with 'Sidra Natural' poured from a height being the speciality. A Guardia Civil boat about fifty feet long with surface piercing propellers was moored there, looking very fast and sinister. Made by Rodman who are very big in Spain. We woke up to thick fog but it was not forecast so we hoped it would clear.

I got out the Jabsco electric oil pump I had bought to suck the engine oil out through the dipstick tube. This is a lousy job with 11 litres of hot oil per engine. It would not work at all. I put Elisha ashore and sat in the fog and dismantled the motor which turned out to have rust and be seized. I dismantled the pump, freed it, cursed Jabsco and decided to try again to change the oil later.

Once again there is massive development on the hills around Ribadesella which will quite change it.



Monday 10th July - Ribadesella to Gijon

Gijon (Gihon) is a huge port with a terrible history in the Spanish Civil War where the dockers and unions fought to the death and the place was flattened with artillery.

The bureaucracy was the worst we had met with copies taken of everything, papers endlessly duplicated and signed and every detail recorded. A complicated system of charging by the square metre with increasing cost per metre according to beam made it difficult to predict the amount! Steve back in Capbreton had warned us about area charging. Never fill in a beam of more than 3 metres when you book in he said. Nobody ever measures it and it rockets the price. As always with ports which could take bigger boats the charges were high. It was very nice though and we enjoyed it.

Tuesday 11th July – Gijon to Ribadeo

We set out once again in mist for Ribadeo. The marina has been extended recently with berths for visitors and can take some quite big boats. Really nice and friendly. Entrance was easy by going up the estuary avoiding the jutting westerly shoal off the point coming in. The tide rips past the marina entrance but not a problem.

Ribadeo is a nice little town with a Parador and good facilities. However no Gasolio A (taxed). Although they have Gasolio B (untaxed) you cannot buy it for a pleasure boat. One of the reasons every boat is covered in fishing rods I'm sure is so they can get a fishing permit and buy Gasolio B! We had to arrange a tanker and hung about for hours. When he finally came he filled another boat first and announced he had run out and would come back next day.

The Raciones offered by Spanish restaurants and pubs are fantastic value. Raciones means portions. For lunch we had grilled fish and potatoes, casseroled meat and chips, bread and about a pint of local wine which can't be bad.

I was dozing in the cockpit one day after lunch when Elisha brought me some boiling hot soup and woke me up. The bowl of soup was on a plastic plate and I was half awake and as she handed it to me it slipped. My wrist was scalded and has been a nuisance for days with big blisters and a forest of small ones and looks very ugly.

The coast up to Ribadeo is called the Costa Verde, the Green Coast. It should be called the Costa Brumoso (Foggy Coast) I think. Day after day the low cloud just sits on the mountains obscuring the lighthouses, the sun and the glorious snow capped mountain scenery of which we have had only one glimpse. Go a mile inland and often the sun shines out of a clear sky, but the fog still sits on the coast.

Thursday 13th July - Ribadeo to Viverio

After two nights in Ribadeo we are entering Galicia, the winds are getting stronger, the fog apparently no less, and the swell higher. Once we turn to port to round Cabo Ortegal and steer south west we are on the Costa da Morte (Coast of Death). 'Not without good reason'. As the Pilot book encouragingly remarks.

We left Ribadeo after waiting yet again for the oil tanker, an hour late and mildly apologetic shrugs. Forecast ENE F5 gusting 7 with swell 2-2.5m (about 8 foot) from the north. The wind was definitely only F2/3 in Ribadeo and I climbed onto the high road bridge with the wind speed meter to check this. I thought they had it wrong. Silly me. Set off for Santa Maria de Ortigueira, 40 nm, at 12:00 as there is a nasty sand bar and I wanted a bit of depth. Our course was NW so swell on starboard bow and wind on starboard quarter. Conditions steadily worsened and 2.5m swell appeared and was not nice. The wind blew the tops off some swell giving dramatic white combers which looked a bit scary. The boat was really great. The bluff bow which I had complained about slamming in the short seas of home lifted magnificently as she was hurled into the swells throwing great sheets of water but little on board. In those conditions we maintained about 20 knots without slamming! We passed a Brit yacht ploughing along and rolling heavily. However it was alarming and I thought Elisha superb, hanging on for dear life and looking now and then for re-assurance. Later she quoted, not quite correctly, 'cowards die a thousand times before their death, the brave but once'. Some coward!

I decided enough was enough and, for the first time, used the bolt hole planned. We turned into the ria³ for Viverio. We heaved about alarmingly with the swell posting us in but it died off as we went up the ria. I thought we would have to anchor but Viverio turned out to have a lovely little new marina in perfect shelter where a big shambling harbour master was the friendliest yet and delighted to see us and full of apologies I had to go looking for him.

An amazing amount of Brit boats in Viverio. Some were:-

- Bagatel
- Signet – Portsmouth
- Hoya – Falmouth
- Myrica whom we passed rolling heavily at sea.

We walked 4km up the local mountain which rewarded us with a superb view and lunch.



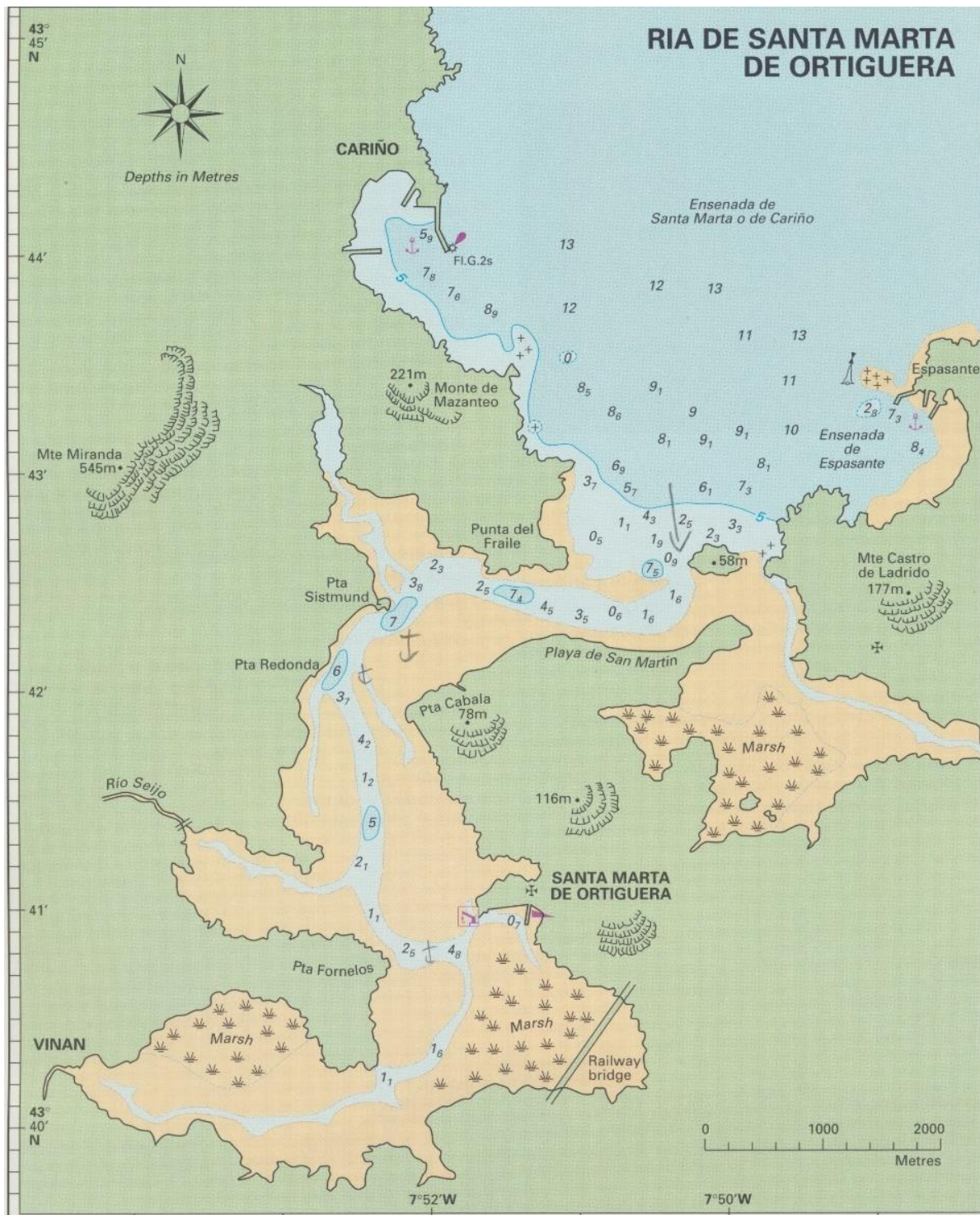
Looking down on Viverio and our mooring

Saturday 15th July – Viverio via (almost) Ortiguera) to Cedeira

We left Viverio in fine weather. A bit misty but sun coming through, with 4 yachts following us. Perhaps they thought we knew what we were doing, or that if it was OK for a power boat it should be OK for them. I have no idea what happened to them!

³ Ria. A flooded valley, similar to a sea loch

The forecast was ENE F5 with 5-10 miles visibility and 1-1.5m swell, 80% reliable it said. We headed north to round Cabo de Bares. The visibility got worse and the swell built up but we got round and turned south into the outer bay of the Ria de Ortiguera. Ortiguera is in the inner ria which is sheltered but has a difficult narrow entrance between shifting sandbars and the Illa de San Vicente.



As we got closer I could see no gap in the breakers at all between the island and the surf where the pilot book assured me there was, at the right tide, a channel. With depth falling rapidly off we crept closer until we had 5 metres decreasing rapidly, there were breakers all round and heavy swell. I was rapidly concluding this was not a goer and the depth was plunging from 5m to 1.5m with the swell when a huge black fish jumped right in front of us, in the surf. Then more of them. Elisha, seriously

worried by the breakers around and ahead of us, thought that on top of our troubles we were surrounded by sharks. She was not happy, even when I assured her they were dolphins. Alarmed myself I hauled round and we headed slowly back up the ria. I just couldn't make out the entrance.

Anne-Marie has since suggested to me that the dolphins were trying to save us and that they did not normally come into surf like that. I think it not impossible though it never occurred to me at the time.

I decided to carry on to Cedeira, the next viable shelter. It should have been easy but we were having a bad day.

As we reached the end of the ria the cloud came down to sea level and visibility down to about 10 feet once we entered it, see picture. The moisture was so intense my glasses started to run with it and I couldn't see. It is difficult to describe but I'll try.

Cold, no visibility beyond 10 feet, high swell beginning to break with a F5 wind. As you could see no distance the swell seemed to be a wall around breaking in white. The boat pitched heavily but in it's own private world. The radar looked and saw only swell. For 1½ hours we struggled through this nightmare. We prayed a big ship would actually show up on the radar as distinct from swell but I really worried about some 14 foot open wooden boat out there fishing which we might run down.



The Fog we had to plunge into to get out of Ria Ortiguera

As we rounded Capo Ortega and turned south west the visibility fractionally improved. Or was it wishful thinking? Then, just as we got to Cedeira, the mist thinned, there was the land, with sun shining on it!

We were round the corner and once again heading south, the end of the Costa del Morte was coming. Above all what we wanted was some decent visibility.

We entered Cedeiria harbour noting the chart plotter was quite wrong and had I followed it we would have gone through a peninsula (which it showed wrongly as an island). Just goes to show the chart plotter is not always right. Anyone who has used GPS in a car in Spain will know that Spanish cartography is not that good.

We came into a lovely anchorage and anchored up in sun. Then the outboard refused to start and I only got it going by fitting a new sparking plug (always carry carry lots of spares!). Then I noticed the violence of the swell had torn loose one of the brackets holding the dinghy on.

We took the dinghy up town and ate. I patched up the dingy clip with makeshift Rawplugs and we took a barbecue with some steak to a deserted beach.

Atlantic Spain



Saturday 15th July – Cederio to Corunna

Next day we set off for Corunna - and turned back. The visibility was again quite awful. Later in the day we tried again and this time managed to get to Corunna. We moored in the new marina watched, suspiciously it seemed to us, by the crew of a customs patrol boat.

I got my oil pump out and this time managed a full oil change for both engines. A messy job but did

it. Engine hours 316 so not another oil change till 400 hours. You really have to carry everything with you. Filters for sure but even oil is hard to come by.

We took the train up to Santiago de Compostella. This ancient pilgrimage centre is a must to visit and even today people on foot, on bicycles and of course by car, pour in. The Parador is in the old Hostel of the Pilgrims and quite astonishing with its courtyards with fountains and galleries.

Occasional burst of really hot sun came through but mostly it was overcast with mist.

Corunna is a nice city with lots to see. The old city is well preserved at the edge of the big modern complex. There are two excellent and friendly yacht clubs who will let you in provided you are reasonably dressed.



Cedeiria Anchorage with new Fisherman's Quarters on Shore



Grand Square in Corunna



Restored Waterfront Tram

We went up for a drink and meal at the R C Nautico, the older club near the anchorage and moorings, closer to the harbour entrance. We took diesel at R C Nautico as the only place in Corunna you could get Gasolio A. I paid with a debit card but the paper screwed up in little hand held machine. The guy who served the diesel, who spoke no English, did not understand and grabbed the machine so that I could not see whether the transaction had been accepted or not. He demanded I did it again but that did not work either as his paper roll was now jammed. So I tried the MasterCard but that did not seem to work so I paid cash. In the end I am lucky that only one of the transactions seems to have gone through and am going to have a big problem sorting it out. I have paid for the diesel at least twice.

We visited the somewhat neglected tomb of Sir John Moore, killed in the battle for Corunna in 1808. He was first buried in a ditch in the walls where he fell and moved twice before ending up in his forgotten little garden.



The Tomb of Sir John Moore in the Corunna Old Town

*We buried him darkly at dead of night,
The sods with our bayonets turning;
By the struggling moonbeam's misty light
And the lantern dimly burning.*

Friday 21st July - Corruna to Portosin

Still hazy when we set out. Very flat outside and passed a dozen sailing boats all motoring our direction.

On the way got a call on the mobile from Anne-Marie to say that Julian Crader had died, peacefully, of cancer. Julian was my ex father in law and I was very sorry to hear of his death. He loved sailing but in later years had, a little grumpily, bought a motorboat.

A lovely run and decided we were doing so well we would go on to Portosin and miss out Camararis. It took four hours covering about 85 miles. Portosin is very nice with a new marina and friendly staff in a sheltered ria.

Lovely people in Portosin. Carmen lived in USA and speaks English, Carmilla speaks very good English and they have repeatedly phoned R C Nautico for me to try and sort things out and get my money back. They have failed.

More harbour fish than I have seen yet in clean water and they sunbathe with their backs out the water. Every time you step on the pontoon there is a swish and splash as they take fright.

Lovely clean beaches and we swam and walked.

We met a Spaniard teaching his son and two others at a café. Very strict even though it was holidays. They were on holiday from Granada to escape the heat and the tourists. Very pleasant and formally polite, a huge powerful man.

Saturday 22nd July – Portosin to Bayona

We set off on Saturday for Bayonna (or Baiona) and I must have misread the forecast – again! Swell from north sounded OK but it was a 2.8m swell and F3 wind on the nose providing a most unpleasant combination.

It was a long tedious slog out of Portosin, out of the Ria and into the swell which reduced our speed to 6 knots. Eventually I said we would turn and re enter the Ria for shelter back in Portosin as it really was very rough. We



were being hurled about and we could make no speed. We also had to take a long route well out to sea round the point because of many outlying reefs, rocks, and shallow patches on which the swell was breaking.

Then the sliding roof broke loose and nearly guillotined me, it was heavy and really difficult to control, like a loose cannon. I had always planned for such an eventuality after Anne-Marie had heard of it happening to someone else. We got a rope over the top and looped it under and secured the roof in the open position.

But Elisha did not want to turn back. “How far have we come?” “How far to go?” “The boat isn’t going to sink is it?” “Why don’t we just keep going at 6 knots?” Doubtfully I agreed, and we slogged grimly on with Elisha quite happy. Eventually we were clear of the reefs and able to turn south and I thought we would seek shelter in Ria Vigo, but Elisha said ‘press on’. So we arrived five hours later in Bayonna.

We moored in the yacht club who swindled us by charging €48.50 on the basis the only berth available was for a big boat. Angrily I agreed but made it only one night. I should have moved but I was tired and I wanted to repair the damage. I was

worried about the dingy clip which had been wrenched half out again, the roof needed proper repair and we discovered that the microwave had been torn from its mounting and crashed into the sink leaving a large hole and lots of exposed wires.

We walked up to the Parador, where we had stayed on a car journey in the past, for old times' sake and it was as beautiful as ever.

Had a beer and agreed it was one of the best. We also had a beer in the yacht club which is in the old fortified outworks protecting the castle gateway. Superb premises but spoilt by anger over mooring charge and a surly waitress. I went along to the other marina and booked a night for €19.

The next day I set to work and carefully dismantled the roof, took all the slides off and the electric motor and wires out. It was a mess with the metal sheathed Bowden cables loose and not aligned. I had bought a spare motor (£100!) just in case. I spent some time understanding how it all worked. Discovered the runner channel was badly bent in a couple of places and carefully re-assembled having hammered it straight, checking as I went. I had a spare cable but managed to re-install the old ones. The new motor was differently wired but I cut the wires and connected it with junction blocks. It all works beautifully now but if the screws connecting the roof to the sliders are tightened up much the roof jams.

I re-fixed the microwave which to my astonishment still worked. Only a few chips out of the wood but it looked like a disaster when we first saw it with wires all hanging out. I checked the engines and fudged up the dinghy clips again. All shipshape (ish) for Portugal now.

We moved the boat to the other marina, lovely pontoons, bigger spaces than the yacht club and half the price. with nice people. Here we started to come across the problem of non - standard electricity plugs on the pontoons for the first time. It was not too bad as there were standard plugs as well but most were much bigger to provide power for big boats with air conditioning and washing machines and I couldn't buy bigger plugs in Bayona.

I took some diesel and changed the fuel and pre-fuel filters. What a messy job but easier next time as I have cut some plastic water bottles to shape to catch the diesel oil that escapes.

Had Paella Valenciana in the same place as years ago, and walked round the lower castle walls.

A steel Norwegian yacht came in next to us. Skipper Terry. He had started out with two women, his wife and her friend, but the friend jumped ship after a terrifying crossing of the North Sea.



**The Parador Grounds Entrance
at Bayona**



Strange Rat Proof Grain Storage

A big 55 footer, it was a beautiful boat. He said Biscay was OK but the North Sea was very bad. The women had held on to each other and sang hymns he said. Sailors generally dislike this as it is said to being bad luck. As soon as they made land his wife's friend left and he had just his wife left to crew this big boat.

I membered how at school, rowing a wooden cutter in a heavy swell in the Murray Firth, we frightened boys had started to sing:

'Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!'

It had seemed very appropriate to us but Danny Main, our instructor, an old seaman, had got very angry with us.

A beautiful 55 ft American yacht, 'Elaine', arrive too. She had sailed from Charleston, South Carolina. Nice people. Steve and Pam, skipper and wife and friend John. They asked us a touch nervously if they were likely to have any problems as they heard 'back home' that Europeans were anti-American. I advised them that they would have no problems though to keep clear of students who were always anti something.

Tuesday 25th July - Bayona to Viano del Castello

After we left Bayona we crossed into Portuguese waters. The weather was clearer, though the wind was stronger, and we aimed for Viana de Castello. It was a superb easy run on flat sea with 2-5 miles visibility. We just could not make out the marina as we came up river and were right at the entrance before we saw it. We moored up in the last slot and were greeted by friendly people. A surprisingly lovely old town, quite charming with traditional buildings with ceramic tiled front, and many alleyways. We walked the stiff climb up to the church on the rock. Superb views.

Trying to get to the church directly we were barred by a railway line which we crossed, scaling the protective wall (it wasn't electrified!). I urged Elisha on saying I thought the express was due and she scaled the far wall in record time.

Stayed another night and tried to get across to the far beach but the ferry was not running. We took barbecue and meat and walked on to Castello. Rather a nice old Portuguese castle, well preserved but neglected and forgotten. Completely surrounded by car parks and industry and cut off from the sea by new breakwaters and docks. About 16th Century I think. Even the V shaped defence for main gateway, proof only against musket fire and mounting no cannon is there. Far Eastern

Portuguese forts waiting for the relief ships that never came as the Portuguese Empire faded away must have looked similar.

We got a taxi to north beach. Mostly rocks and the wind now very strong so barbecue blown out and a failure. Taxi back to town where wandered back to boat with a takeaway. We did washing and Elisha cut her toe in the metal door of the laundrette, which bled copiously.

Friday 28th July - Viano del Castello to Povia de Varzim

Off the next morning by 09:15. Wind, from north, F4 and 1m swell so quite lively. Surrounded by fishing floats as we left harbour, some guarded by boats. There seemed nowhere to go! We wanted to get out to sea to the 20 mile line but wherever you turned there were these tiny faded flags on bamboo popping up out of the swell. About 2 miles out a boat turned and raced towards us. Was he trying to drive us off? Ram us? I slowed and tried turning away but there were pots everywhere. Then Elisha called we were dragging a pot and she thought the wildly gesticulating men had a gun. Of course they hadn't, at least I think not. I tipped the motors up and lay along the bathing platform with a boat hook trying to free the rope which it turned out linked the pot to other pots. The boat was feet away surging on the swell, with the men shouting, and pulling at the rope. Eventually we got it clear and carried on. We had not cut their rope so parted amiably enough.

We spend the next hour dodging floats and nets, anxiously peering ahead.

We entered Porvo de Varzim, only about 25nm, and the wind had strengthened. I had great difficulty berthing in the marina as there was a strong cross wind, and was blown onto a British yacht from Southampton. Fortunately we just wiped him with the dingy and no one was on board. I gave up attempts to reverse in and went in to the wind bow first. Another brit yachtie took the ropes from Elisha and we tied up. Not my finest performance. We had a much needed cold beer and watched the yacht we had touched until we



Viana de Castello



Elisha Dodges the Train at Viana de Castello



The Portuguese Coast

saw the owner return with provisions. I went across and explained. He was R.S.Y.C (Royal South Southampton Yacht Club) and on his way to the ARC (Atlantic Rally for Cruisers) assembly point to cross the Atlantic and most amiable. He could see no damage and I asked him to check carefully later to be sure. He did and gave me a cheerful thumbs up that all was OK.

We had thought at Viana de Castelo that we had lost Brit yachts as the skipper of the only one there was married to a Portuguese lady with a local apartment. Wrong though. At least six boats here in Povoá de Varzim and the ARC seems to be the magnet. All Caribbean bound.

A very new marina with lots of space and, like so much of Portugal, a building site. Very friendly girl who charged us for two nights including showers etc. Quite a walk from town but a free drink in the Yacht Club.

We took the Metro to Porto, 28km or an hour away. Brand new and very efficient. Went to the Port lodges and had lunch before visiting Sandeman's Port Lodge. Only to discover Portuguese time is Brit Summer Time and we were still on Spanish time. Enjoyable visit with tasting and bought a bottle of white port.

We took a 50 minute cruise up Douro and I madly photographed the old Nunnery where Wellington had stood watching the crossing of the Douro, and the Seminary on the opposite bank that the Brits seized. What a dramatic and beautiful old town with its cliffs rising out of the river, buildings stacked impossibly on top of each other. Lovely riverside bars and restaurants and much quieter than our first visit by car when it was crammed with football supporters and noise.

In spite of Pilot book warning of how dirty the river, "an open sewer", is and infections picked up by intrepid yachties who moored alongside quays hundreds of children were swimming and diving. It didn't look that dirty but maybe the tide was coming in.

Back on the Metro to a stiff cold northerly wind which gave us a chilly noisy night with waves slapping on the hull. Woke up to sun and not a breath of wind.

Spent the next day pleasantly in Povoá de Varzim.



Tasting Port in Porto



Povoá de Varzim

Saturday 29th July - Povoá de Varzim to Leixões

Next day, Saturday, after much hesitation regarding visibility and swell, we set out for Figuera planning to call in at Leixões 12 miles away for fuel. Four miles out we ran into a thick bank of fog and clawed our way to Leixões at 6 knots conscious of big shipping in area.

At Leixões we discovered a dirty commercial harbour and, to our astonishment, there was no fuel. The pump had burnt out years ago and didn't work. The tanker, which you had to arrange for yourself delivered minimum 500 litres and required cash payment. Fairly blank unhelpful reaction from the Marina man. In the end he lent me a trolley and 3 x 25 litre cans and off I set to the petrol station which he said was 0.8 kilometres away. Paid and staggered back. His assistant Ferdinand helped me get the trolley down the steep ramp without it running away and helped me pour in the diesel which, due to the filler position on the stern, I could not have done on my own. I took a couple of beers up and drank one with them. The English talking one loved Glasgow and became increasingly friendly.

At about 07:00 on Sunday morning when I was having coffee I heard a voice calling. 'Oi, oi, oi'. I looked out but could see nobody. In the end it turned out to be a Portuguese yacht who had just come in and wanted diesel. Calling 'oi!' is the usual Portuguese way of attracting attention it seems. He was incredulous when I explained and as the office was shut Sunday he couldn't borrow the trolley. Off he set with his crew carrying spare cans. Many Portuguese swear words floated over the water.

There was a big 'tug boat' called Holmwood, moored the other side of the wall and it was British. Peter and Denise were crew and they had come in for 'at least two tons of fuel'. They could not go further without and were waiting for Monday for the tanker. He had rung ahead and been assured there was diesel. But they meant Gasolio B and the port wouldn't supply him Gasolio B. We shall have all this nonsense in Britain soon. Thank you European Union bureaucrats.

We left in poor visibility but it soon cleared and we looked back on the thick cloud of pollution over Leixões. Advice - just don't go there.

Sunday 30th July - Leixões to Figuera de Foz

A lovely run to Figuera de Foz in the sun. I didn't see the reception Pontoon and moored up in a convenient, slot so we got a visit from a policeman with a gun saying he had blown his whistle and we had ignored him. I walked with him up to reception, a long way round, and booked in. Spent a day there and met Tony, Martin and their wives, who brought their yachts in, one each side of us. Also in search of fuel and baffled.

Got diesel from a card operated pump. Took card 4 times before it refused so only got $\frac{3}{4}$ tank now. I scratched the gel coat on the awful fuel pontoon metal struts, stupid me.

Tuesday 1st August - Figueria de Foz to Peniche

A good run to Peniche with about F3 and 1.7m swell. Saw dolphins and lots of pots! We moored in Peniche, which is a huge fishing port with massive processing plants that work 24 hours a day sounding sirens for the next fishing boat to come in and unload. Visitors can berth only on the exposed outer side of the pontoons for local boats. Very friendly but customs again separate from marina and stopped me on the pontoon for passports and papers. We ended up both kneeling on the pontoon holding bits of paper down against the wind.

We met Terry the Norwegian and his wife in their blue steel yacht again. A very rocky night on the pontoon with a swell and fishing boats passing close at full speed throwing boats against the pontoons and each other.

The fishing boats were a nightmare. There is a 3 knots speed limit in the harbour of which the fishing boats take absolutely no notice. 15 knots I estimated a big one passed us at and it is astonishing no damage was caused to the nearby yachts. I had to hold on to the hose stand for dear life to remain standing on the heaving walkway. All day and night they charge in and out and the sirens blew.



Peniche Harbour with its Processing Factories



Crowded Moorings in Peniche

Victor, the Capitano, said if we stayed for the Fiesta we would get no sleep. I said we didn't anyway with the wash. "The fishing boats." He said. "We have 3 noes (knots) speed limit but the fishermen!" And he put his hands over his face. "They are blind to it."

Friday 4th August – Peniche to Cascais

Forecast NNE F4 going to F3 as we go south with swell 2-2.5m from NW. Vis 5-10.

We went on towards Cascais which is just as you turn east into the estuary of the Rio Tejo which leads up to Lisbon. Heavy swell and lots of fish floats with the worst markings yet. Just bits of cork in some cases, or polystyrene. It was dramatic with great mountains of water rearing up over the boat but not too bad really. Visibility misty as usual. Capo de Roco and Rasco were particularly dramatic with the sun behind the mist outlining them like a surreal painting.

We ran 55 miles and into Cascais. The swell dropped off as we rounded the capes and it became flat calm with no wind. Into the marina where we were very well received. Big electrical plugs again and still had no adaptor. Lifted the boat out and did the ring anodes again and had it washed off, a mistake as the hull was fine and the mad pressure hoser took off half the antifoul. Only the motors needed doing. Into the water and tucked into a nice berth. We met Tony, Martin and wives, who we had met in Leixões at the chandlery where I bought a large electrical adaptor for €20.

Walked round town and swam. Next day into Lisbon on the coast train where we took a super old tram trip round the old city. Highly recommended. Up in a very high lift where I had my worst attack of vertigo yet. Astonishing lovely old town. Next day we came out of the marina at Cascais and anchored to keep costs down. Evening breeze but calm night apart from loud music till 04:00 hours. No tune, just boom, boom, boom.

Upped anchor and said good morning to Tony's wife in 'Full Flight' but no sign of Tony. They staying there for a few days.

Sunday 6th August – Cascais to Sines

A superb run of 54 miles south to Sines with almost flat sea and sun coming through the haze. Easy entrance to huge commercial harbour with the surprisingly clean little marina at the far side tucked into its own harbour with a beach. Anchorage option as well. Birthplace of Vasco de Gama and a statue of the great man gazes out to sea in front of the old castle.

Wednesday 7th August - Sines to Lagos



We left Sines at 09:06 as the weather looked settled and we wanted to clear Cape St Vincent, which has a reputation for confused seas, in calm conditions.

Being the most south-westerly point in mainland Europe, this wind blasted and storm pounded headland is steeped in naval history.

There have been at least 10 significant sea battles off Cape St Vincent. A landfall and a departure point for ships coming across the Atlantic, a pivotal turning point for ships leaving the Mediterranean for northern Europe, or sailing from the north to Gibraltar. It was a place where you knew your enemy must pass and so a place where battle fleets met. Admiral Sir John Jervis with 15 ships of the line met the Spanish fleet and destroyed it there in a battle in February 1797. He became an Earl and took the title Earl St Vincent.

"There are eight sail of the line, Sir John"

"Very well, sir"

"There are twenty sail of the line, Sir John"

"Very well, sir"

"There are twenty five sail of the line, Sir John"

"Very well, sir"

"There are twenty seven sail of the line, Sir John"

"Enough, sir, no more of that; the die is cast, and if there are fifty sail I will go through them."

We had a really good run at 25 kn. It was slightly rougher round the Cape but not too much. Visibility, as usual, about 5 miles. A dramatic cape jutting out into the Atlantic. A ninety degree turn to port and we were heading east towards Gibraltar at last. This picture was taken from our boat looking north after we had rounded the cape and shows the slightly hazy conditions so typical of the whole coast.

We coasted along to Lagos and into the narrow channel entrance



past extraordinary rock formations. I knew it was bad news as we approached the reception pontoon when two bronzed young men in white shorts with the Marina logo on their shirts rushed up to take the ropes, our first introduction to the Marianos curse. After a month tying up on our own in strange ports in all conditions they were exasperating. Seeing Elisha with a rope they would leap around on the pontoon yelling, even screaming, at her. They must get the rope from this presumed incapable woman and lash it to the nearest strongpoint. This was generally a cleats aft of bow, thus removing my control of the boat completely. Poor Elisha was quite shaken on a couple of occasions and handed over the mooring line. After this performance they expected tips!!

A huge marina development with shops and restaurants. Nice old town of Lagos but crammed with tourists, mostly English. A Supermarket at the end of the marina allows trolleys back to the boats and has a collection service at key points. We took the opportunity to stock up to the brim with the heavy things, beer, water, jars of olives etc.

Tuesday 8th August - Lagos to Alvor

We left next day at 12:00 and anchored off Alvor where we swam from superb beaches and had a picnic lunch. We were passed by four Jeanneau Prestige 34s! Cruising together in a group and the first time we had seen a boat like ours since leaving home. Then into Alvor's narrow entrance only 3nm away and the creeks and lagoons within and anchored for the night.

The tide rushed in and out, jet ski's and fast local ferries taking tourists to the beach plagued us, but it was beautiful and the sun shone. In the evening the traffic died away and we were left in peace. We barbecued on the beach. We were practically on the sandy bottom when the tide was out and would not be able to leave till 10:00 the next day when we aim for Vilamoura to get Volvo spares.

Wednesday 9th August – Alvor to Vilamoura

Vilamoura is a gigantic expensive marina and is the core of the town. Crammed with huge power boats and yachts it is a different world from Sines.

Smart workers appear first thing to wash down and Hoover out people's boats. Glamorous Cafes and boutiques surround the marina. But the Volvo agent does not stock spares! In Vilamoura owners do not do their own maintenance, totally beneath them. No place to be.

Thursday 10th August - Vilamoura to Tavira

Next day we moved on 38 miles to Tavira. A lovely little anchorage though very busy with jet skis and water taxis in the day. Spring tides running strongly but we found a deep hole and were OK.

Friday 11th August – Tavira to Mazagon

Then on to Mazagon, crossing the border into Spain again, for a night and some fuel. Very ordinary little marina with small boats, nothing remotely like Vilamoura and Lagos. Grim toilets block, you had to put down a deposit on the keys, with stainless steel doors that someone had cut through with a welding torch. We grilled chicken on the pontoon.

Saturday 12th August – Mazagon to Cadiz via Santa Maria

We took Diesel, got deposit on toilet keys back and left. An hour out heading in choppy sea for Puerto de Santa Maria in the Bay of Cadiz, I realised I had not actually paid the mooring fee at Mazagon. I tried to call on radio and mobile. Failed. Got hold

of Kathryn in UK who sorted out a number for me and she called them and they were quite relaxed. I had visions of being chased by a Spanish Guardia Civil gunboat!

We entered the huge Bay of Cadiz and cruised across to Puerto Sherry, a new marina, - and were not allowed to stay, a regatta had booked all the moorings. We mooched across the bay to Cadiz through ridiculous amounts of fishing boats. Into Puerto



America and moored up. They were all on Siesta. Booked in at four thirty and rung Mazagon who gave me a huge string of numbers to pay which made no sense. Went back to the Capitanio and asked for help as they part of same group. No problem. He looked up the computer, found the unpaid invoice, paid it with my credit card and gave me a receipt.

An unexciting dusty marina but a safe mooring and I got Volvo spares from a hut. Only months later when I tried to fit them did I find out they had supplied the wrong ring anodes, though I had given them the correct part number!

A long walk into Cadiz. Lovely old town with a great walk round through the park along the ramparts. Excellent dinner of meat Paella two. Stroll through town with a splendid old cathedral that Drake sacked, and taxi back to boat. Apparently the British considered taking Cadiz instead of Gibraltar but decided they had not enough manpower to hold such a city.

Had another pleasant day in Cadiz with bus tour and back to boat. We meant to leave on the 14th for Santi Practi but the tide was dropping and we were too lazy so went to Puerto Sherry, also called Marina Puerto Santa Maria across the bay. A long walk into town but nice enough and taxi back. We found ourselves locked out of our section of marina and when I tentatively tried to climb over the gates large guard dogs appeared behind them barking angrily, so I cancelled the idea. I had just decided I'd have to swim to the boat round the end of the security fence in the dark and come back with dinghy for Elisha, when a security guard, attracted by the barking, arrived on a scooter and explained you now had to walk 1/2 mile round the back way as it was after nine o'clock. Angrily we did so. Elisha asked for lift on his scooter but was refused.

Next day we took the boat back across the bay to Puerto Sherry, the regatta now being over and space available and took a taxi into Santa Maria. The shops were shut as it was a Fiesta. Lunch, buggy ride round town and a bullfight at €60 each as Elisha was determined to see one. I told her she would not enjoy it. We had the best seats close to the killing! A barbaric spectacle with clear links to the gladiators of Rome. The skill and bravery of the Banderillos is fantastic but in the end it was just killing, rather messily, eight bulls. Very colourful but I am sure Elisha will never ask again, she seemed to have her eyes tight shut most of the time.



Bullfight in Puerto Sherry

Monday 14th August – Santa Maria to Barbate

We debated the forecast for Wednesday but when I got up the wind was less and I decide not to wait. I woke Elish and we ran for it. A slog into 1.2m westerly swell and westerly wind out of Cadiz bay but once we turned east it was a comfortable run. We passed as close to Trafalgar as we dared but nasty rough water over the long dangerous ridge that extends miles out to sea. From the west it looked like a headland with a row of ships or rocks, then a lighthouse. Actually low lying land with lighthouse on a rise.

For the first time we saw Africa! The land beyond Trafalgar turned out to be Morroco. It was a big moment for us.

We decided to go into Barbate and had to avoid a huge Tuna net a couple of miles long and not to be argued with. Into Barbate, a very new marina and OK. Met Margaret and Daniel on 'Orient Express', a 14 metre power boat and had a beer or two with them.

Did the laundry and got a call from A-M saying she was in Soto Grande and going to meet us at Gibraltar when we got there. Anne-Marie, our elder daughter, and Rory have an apartment in Soto Grande which we had never seen, with their Princess 43 moored right in front of it. Soto Grande is about 10nm north of Gibraltar on the Spanish Mediterranean coast, a large modern development where you only have to go a few yards to step into your boat.

Friday 18th August - Barbate to Gibraltar to Soto Grande

We had a great run past Tarifa into Gibraltar and fuelled up with no formalities once we found the fuelling berth. It was another big moment for us, seeing the Rock. All the warnings about strong winds in the straits were not needed. The fuelling berth was right alongside the runway and the wing of planes taking off and landing seemed so close as to be actually over our boat.

It was nice to speak English again and the fuel was so cheap! But there is no marina space. You can anchor, unofficially, beside the airport runway if you don't mind planes landing in your boat!

The rock is desperately dramatic. Anne-Marie rang saying they had a berth for us in Soto Grande and would meet us off point Europa, the southernmost point of Europe.



At Last – The Rock of Gibraltar in Sight

We flew through the strait of Gibraltar with 3 knots of tide and the wind behind us. As we rounded the point they came tearing up in their Princess 43 with A-M, Emily, Annabel, Rory, Melanie, Christian, Elliot, Tom and a few others, looking magnificent as they circled us waving bottles of champagne. We followed them into the bay before Soto Grande and anchored for champagne and lunch and a celebration. What a welcome!

Then into Soto Grande where Rory had arranged a berth right in front of their apartment. What luxury after so long. They had baths, showers and comfort. We had a marvellous time being lazy for a week eating and relaxing in good company.

We visited Gibraltar twice and I immersed myself in its history. Many of the wounded who died after Trafalgar are buried here where the damaged ships came in for repair. The rock tunnels with artillery are amazing and in one chamber General Napier of the March to Magdala fame had entertained President General Ulysses Simpson Grant of the American civil war.

A strange place, British but not really, and with enormous amounts of Spanish workers who come in daily and are very offhand.

The runway blocks the land entrance to Gibraltar so 'level crossing' gates close each time a plane lands or takes off.

Re-development has temporarily closed one marina and it is extremely hard to get a berth. Cleanliness is not up to Spanish or Portuguese standards. The local tourist office is in league with the taxi drivers and tell you must take a taxi tour to be allowed into the caves and galleries. They told us we could not be allowed in if we walked. But we walked up and got in free. All lies.



Picture taken by Family as we round Europa Point



Moored outside Rory's Apartment (the blue one) at Soto Grande

19th to 25th August in Soto Grande

Having been living in the boat since June it was a delight to relax for a week in Soto Grande with our daughter Anne-Marie and our son-in-law Rory Byrne. They have a beautiful flat there and royally entertained us.

The log was 4,655 and had been 2,648 so we had done 2007 nm.

Reflections so far

I was very happy about our voyage so far. We had gained experience of vastly different coasts and overcome various navigational and weather hazards on the way. Maybe more luck than judgement but we had made Gibraltar.

The difference between rock studded coasts, shifting sandbars and judging sea conditions in heavy swells had been educational to say the least. We'd met many great people who were out there meeting the same challenges we were.

Realistically the Jeanneau was not the ideal boat and I don't imagine her designers every expected her to operate in some of the conditions we met. The brochures all show beautiful girls in bikinis spread out on the foredeck.

The sliding roof was totally inadequate and a constant problem. Good idea, lousy engineering. But she was the only boat we had, and on the whole she did well.

Choosing the older Volvo KAD 34 engines with cable controls and no electronics was an inspired decision. If you have a problem there is nobody on that coast who will be able to help. Even the duo prop propellers were practically unknown. If you can do basic maintenance and repairs yourself you are streets ahead. If you can't, don't go.

Mediterranean Spain, The Balearics and France



Friday 25th August – Soto Grande to Marina del Este (Anchored)

We reluctantly left Soto Grande, waving goodbye to Anne-Marie and Rory who came out in the Princess 42 to see us off, and were on the sea on our own again. Our next planned port was Marina del Este just round Point Conception described as ‘in beautiful surroundings with a good anchorage off the beach’ as a fallback, about 85nm. We passed Marabella and Malaga, struggling through dense patches of fog. Marina del Este looked very nice and picturesque even though it was a large modern housing development with an artificial marina, but it was full so we went round the headland and anchored in the bay.

The chart showed us come to rest right over a large rock and there was still about eighteen inches of tide. We never found the rock, the depth sounder could not see it, we probed with our extended boat hook, and I had a look round in the dinghy so shrugged and went to sleep without going ashore.

Saturday 26th August – Marina del Este to Porto Genoves

On from del Este to San Hose round Capo de Gata, about 80nm further on, where we anchored, ate and got supplies. Like most Spanish beaches we met anchoring was difficult as bathing zones are marked off quite a long way out with limited narrow channels you can take the dinghy to shore through. ELISHA seemed far offshore from the land with nobody aboard and this always makes me uneasy. The small marina (full) has a very tiny fuel berth and we could only get half our 10 metres alongside with a jagged rock in front but we got filled up.

We saw an incredible amount of dolphins on the way. They herded sardines into a tight shoal, working as a team, and when the sardines were sufficiently dense they tore into them and feasted. Clouds of screaming gulls grabbed the wretched fish as they leapt out the water to avoid the dolphins.

We reversed our course back about 5 nm to the sandy bay of Porto Genoves and anchored for the night. There are no facilities but a nice enough overnight stop. Next

day when we woke up there was no wind but poor visibility which seems to follow us everywhere.

We really flew up the Spanish Mediterranean coast, partly because we needed to get home and had not planned this section, but also the relatively smooth water allowed most cruising at 25 knots, unlike the Atlantic.

Friday 26th August - Porto Genoves to Puerto Torrevieja

A good run with a stop for lunch and a swim at Cabo de Palos. A nice anchorage but shore covered in holiday housing so we didn't visit. We anchored outside Puerto Torrevieja listed as having a good clean modern marina having done 90nm and a little tired. Puerto Torrevieja turned out to be a miserable dump of holiday flats with a smelly factory. On the way in to the bay we hit the wake awkwardly of a large outgoing powerboat and the roof went again. It lifts right up and then crashes down on the rails and bends them badly. I made yet another running repair but it is not good.

We anchored outside Puerto Torrevieja harbour as close to the beach as we were allowed and were plagued by jet skis and speedboats until darkness fell and we turned in.

Sunday 27th August –Torriegva to Puerto de Calpe

Forecast for Sunday good visibility at last! F2 variable in the morning. This is a bit more like it. We considered running straight for Formentara a distance of 130nm but longer over open sea to go than I like if I can avoid it, with dire warnings about how suddenly the Mediterranean weather could turn into a storm.

So we set out for Puerto de Calpe, about 70nm, and its rock, Penon de Ifach, looking from a distance like a miniature Gibraltar. The coast was dramatic barren cliffs broken by a waterfall cascading down into the blue sea. At last conditions more as we expected in the Med. Real Club Nautico Calpe (Calpe Marina) found us a slot, for a night. We needed water and fuel and food but should have anchored outside in retrospect.

We met an English guy, Les, who had been there for 20 years in his boat. Calpe itself was once apparently beautiful. A Spanish fishing village nestling at the bottom of its dramatic rock. Now it is just tawdry holiday flats and beaches crammed with food and raucous holiday makers.

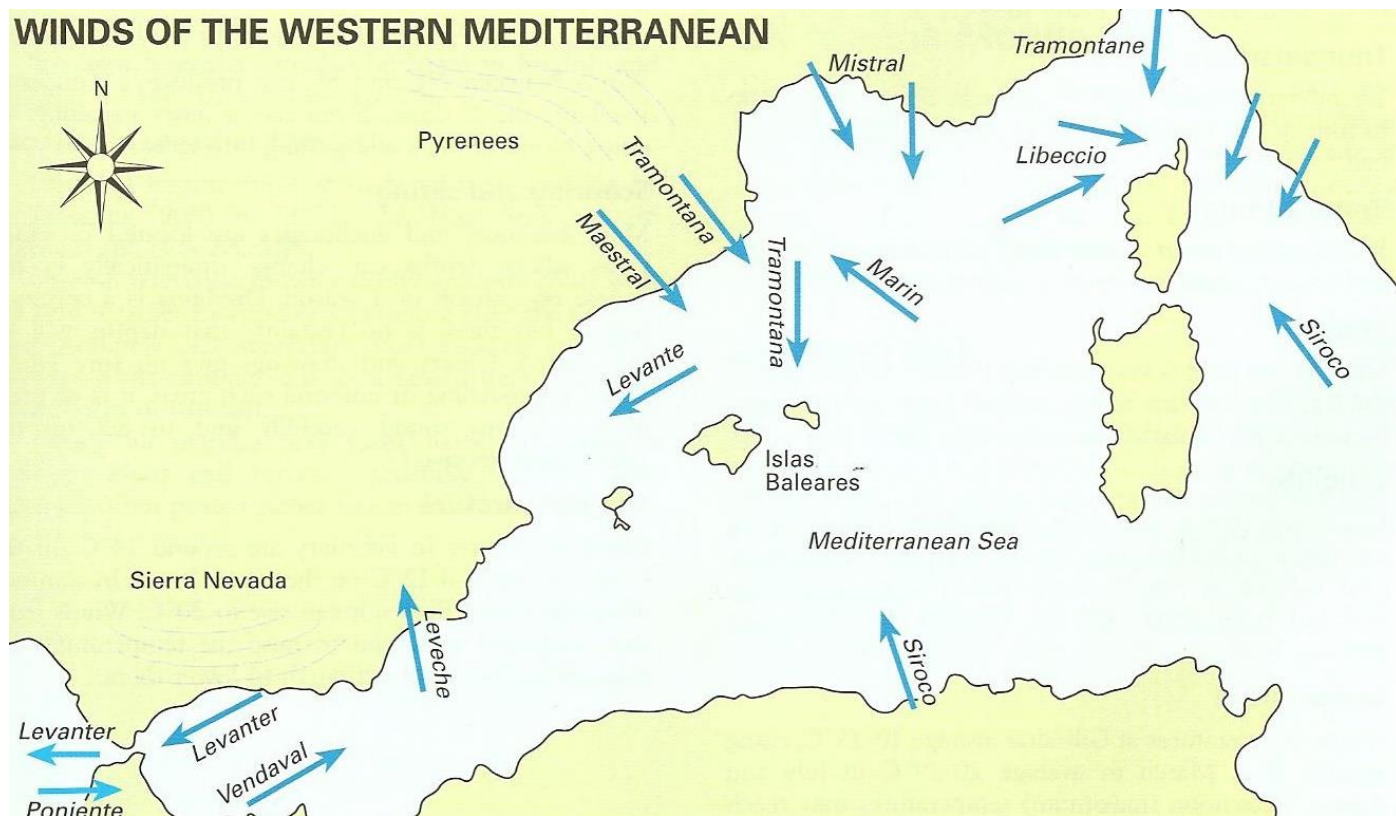
We did not climb the Penon de Ifach, The Pilot book said you got a spectacular view of '*the uncontrolled nature of high rise and commercial building*' which seemed depressing. It looked bad enough from the sea.

Monday 28th August - Calpe to Formentera

We fuelled up, avoiding the overflowing waste bins and dog droppings of Calpe, to ensure full tanks in case we had to do any long diversions, and left without regret for Isla de Formentera just south of Ibiza. We had a lovely run of 65nm to Puerto de Sabina, the only harbour on Formentera. We anchored off in some swell and took the dinghy through the very narrow rocky entrance to the shallow lagoon at back of the town which is on a spit. Thank goodness I didn't try to get ELISHA through! We did some shopping and got a new Camping Gaz cylinder. The lagoon was astonishingly clean and I had left the dingy on the beach in front of a hotel so we had a beer and swam. We moved up the coast a few miles to Puerto de Espalmador for the night. Mooring buoys were laid so we felt secure enough and we were sheltered behind Isle de la Alga, a little rocky island. The wind got up steadily and it got colder. The sea became quite choppy and the boats heaved about at their moorings. I was glad we were not at anchor or I would not have slept at all especially as the Imray Pilot book says the holding can be poor.

Formentera is a lovely island. Our mooring was free, or nobody collected, and there was a complete absence of officials. A RIB visited us at about 17:00 with two very wet crew and I thought it was the money men. But no, they offered to get us a hot takeaway of our choice from town. We declined and later regretted it as the wind rose and we tried to heat some soup without getting scalded.

Visitors are strictly limited by the small amount of fresh water available which boats have to buy, so the developments in Spain and Ibiza have not happened. I'd love a week there just relaxing.



Tuesday 29th August - Formentera to Cala Llonga, Ibiza

Next day we called again at Puerto de Sabina and swam and had breakfast at the hotel.

We set off for Ibiza, the wind and sea having abated, taking a tour round the island admiring the huge cliffs to the south and anchoring underneath them for lunch and a swim.

After lunch when we had completed our circuit we ran the short distance across the channel to Ibiza town. The marina confirmed all my prejudices about Ibiza. At the edge stood a famous disco/club. At the bar along the quay were some very strange characters, or am I not allowed to say that of transvestites?

After waiting till 1600 before the office opened, I stood for nearly 20 minutes while girls chatted on the phone and told each other with many giggles about their boyfriends latest exploits. Eventually an indifferent girl condescended to notice me and asked what I wanted. Yes, she said after consultation, there was a berth by the road but no electricity or water or security. I agreed reluctantly and was instantly passed to another girl who kept getting telephone calls from her boyfriend. I gritted my teeth as she went through a huge questionnaire. She then told me where to go and asked €70 for the night. I said she had wasted my time, she said I had wasted hers and we parted on bad terms.

Angrily I went back and told Elisha we would just top up the fuel and anchor somewhere. This turned out to be a good decision. We went a little up the coast and found there is a different delightful Ibiza outside the town and anchored in a sheltered cove called Cala Llonga between high cliffs in clean water. The daily visitors left and we stayed free. A small beach unapproachable by foot looked nice so we took the barbecue and some steak and wine and relaxed and I recovered my good humour.

Ibiza town confirmed my impression that the more you pay for a marina berth the less pleasant the staff are. Perhaps they hate anyone rich enough to pay their exorbitant rates.

Ibiza island turned out to have lots of lovely anchorages, all free and is strongly recommended. Most have bars and restaurants but also the extended swimming zones which go far out to sea.

Wednesday 30th August – Cala Llonga, to Cala de San Vicente, Ibiza

Next day was rougher and we went up the coast to Cala de San Vicente but it was very rough by the time we got there, and I was thankful to get into shelter. We put the anchor down and fouled a heavy mooring chain which, with the wind and sea, was hard work getting clear of. The next day the wind had dropped a bit, still from the south, and I calculated that if we headed for Cala de San Vicente on the north coast we would find progressively better conditions. This was true and we anchored happily there in calm water. I dropped Elisha ashore and went back to do some engine checks and other minor repairs.

Later I joined her with the barbecue and we had a nice dinner then walked along the sea and cliffs.

Thursday 31st August – Cala de San Vicente to Cala Portinax, Ibiza

A gentle run up to Portinax so as to be well placed for the run to Majorca. A lovely quiet night at anchor in the bay with a small hospitable Hotel.

Friday 1st September - Portinax, Ibiza to Palma, Majorca

The next day the forecast looked good so we decided to run the 60nm to Palma, Majorca. It was a good run with little sign of other shipping. I wanted to get close to town as I had reached the end of my charts and had no pilot book once we moved on, so we went to inner Pier 46. After calling on five buildings I finally found the marina office and paid. €84! No toilets or showers but very central. Used by charter boats and so there was constant activity. A rubbish boat came in and moored beside us. In the evening a very noisy floating disco kept coming round right up to us moored boats until 02:00. A maddened Australian on a yacht close to us screamed at them to **** off, but they just tooted plastic trumpets at him and honked horns. I thought he would have a seizure.

I got my charts and Elisha visited the striking Cathedral and we had lunch. I then studied my charts and considered the next move. The nearest mainland landfall was Barcelona, a fair distance away. We could go round to a cove on the north coast of Majorca, say Soller, to minimise the open water. But for all the difference it made we might as well skirt the coast to Cape Tramuntana and head off. This would give us an open sea run of about 118nm plus the coastal distance of about 15.

The winds of the Mediterranean worried me. Should I fear most the Tramontana? The Levante? The Mistral? For example, from Imray Pilot about the Tramontana which affects chiefly the coast to the north of Barcelona. *“The Tramontana can be dangerous in that it can arrive and reach gale force in as little as fifteen minutes on a calm sunny day, with virtually no warning. Signs to watch out for are brilliant visibility, clear sky – sometimes with cigar-shaped clouds. The tramontana normally blows for at least 3 days.”* (text abbreviated)

Saturday 2nd September - Palma to Puerto Olympia, Barcelona

We left Palma at 0830 and arrived Port Olympia, Barcelona at 1415 so 135 nm in 6 hours so we averaged 22.5 knots. It was a long uneventful run but given all the warnings about Mistrals and *tramontana* coming out of nowhere I was very glad to sight land and we saw no cigar shaped clouds.

There were lots of huge ships outside Barcelona and we dodged two under weigh. It was not easy to tell which moving and which were anchored. By the time we reached the somewhat featureless Port Olympia the wind had got up a bit. As I edged her into the visitors pier to report a marianos rushed up and demanded loudly the ropes from Elisha who was waiting correctly, until she could step ashore. Browbeaten she threw him the bow rope which he instantly lashed short to a cleat halfway along the boat length thus totally depriving me of control. It is exasperating and keeps happening. When we got to the very narrow slot we had been allocated between two boats our marianos appeared again. I reversed in allowing for the wind and drift. First he wanted me in bows to, and then he decided I was going to miss the slot so ran out along the deck of another boat shouting and gesticulating as to how I should do it. I reversed in neatly and made fast. He came for his tip, got none and sulked off.

Sunday 3rd September - Barcelona to L'Estartit

The next day was eventful. We cruised happily on with no definite objective through the sea was very busy with leisure craft, and after 54 miles looked for a Cala for lunch. All were crammed with anchored boats. We nosed into Cala Canjes full of moorings as usual but found a spot and anchored outside other boats close to the cliff. I was just getting the dinghy ready to go ashore when along came a Spanish speedboat with a girl in a bikini on the bow and a guy steering. She carefully dropped her anchor, on his instruction, right across our chain.

I tried to indicate that they were over our chain and had dropped their anchor upwind, which was onshore, so they would drift onto us. Lots of smiles and waves. It was obvious what would happen so got a fender out and waited. When it dawned on them that they were going to hit us he shouted loudly at her and she madly hauled at their anchor shouting apologies in English. He reversed off at speed as the chain came up. Their anchor slid down our chain, locked in our anchor, and pulled it loose. I tried to attract his attention without success. He speeded up his outboard. Again it took some time before he realised he was towing us and that was why he was going so slowly.

I got them to stop and took in our anchor as the only thing to do was get them up to the surface and untangle them. The usual Spanish yelling and arm waving resulted. No! No! No! etc. I took no notice and got my anchor to the surface at which stage he saw, and understood, the position. He leaned over and the anchors. Now they were very apologetic, especially the, very pretty, girl who was apparently being blamed. 'We go now', she said sadly, 'and leave you alone'. Elisha who had been running around with another fender was very upset and had been convinced the boats would crash causing real damage as the sea was typically choppy with the afternoon breeze.

Of course we had drifted helpless towards the anchored boats and were now very close to one of them, which didn't help. They sensibly had all their fenders out having watched the show but we managed to avoid them and went on to Cala Cadena as Elisha had decided she didn't like Cala Canjes.

We found the Cala Cadena covered in mooring buoys which I thought might be Visitors so we picked one up. I was just studying the shore to see where we could take the dinghy in when up roared two RIBS to say it was forbidden. I apologised and

asked if we could anchor. He asked how long and when we said just lunch he directed us to another buoy for a boat our size. We had a good lunch at last and went on to Aiguablava, a favourite place of Bob and Marion Tudor, old friends of ours.

It was beautiful, really lovely, but again crammed with moorings and quite impossible to stop.

So we went on to Islas Medes, a Marine Reserve, and picked up a buoy. These are stunning steep sided small rock islands and they had a few mooring buoys laid. We got one and swam and relaxed.

As night fell all the other boats left and we relished the lonely beauty of the place. Our RCC Pilot told us we could stay for the night as long as we had a mooring, but not anchor, so all was well, or so we thought. Just as we had showered and eaten and were settling for the night a warden came racing up in the darkness to tell us we could not stay. Forbidden. Not possible. Not having any backup plan I was unwilling to flounder about in strange rocky Calas in the dark so we crossed to L'Estartit on the mainland in the dark and anchored outside the Diue, or harbour wall. No one chased us away and we had a quiet night.

We were woken by the great red ball of the sun coming over the horizon and glaring into the cabin.

Monday 4th September - L'Estartit to Port Vendres, France

Not too far round the corner was Ampurias where we anchored in bay opposite the Hotel Ampurias. A sentimental visit for me and a thoughtful one. I was thirteen and it was our first holiday abroad, after my mother decided that Scotland was turning us into 'little savages', and we needed some culture. Ampurias was a Greek and then a Roman port and the extensive ruins, open and forgotten except by people who were interested, are now fenced, labelled and of course you pay to go in.

I remembered my family there and how we loved the warm sea. How much my mother loved it, the late dinners and that it was £1 a night including dinner and wine. You could only take £50 a head out of UK in those days and France was far too expensive so Brits would drive almost non stop to get to Spain where they could eke out their allowance. It puzzled me as a child, and still does, that Germans and French had no such restrictions and we were the poor ones. I had always been told we had won the war.

The hotel is practically unchanged since 1952 but is now Hostal Ampurias as it has no en-suite bathrooms and has been downgraded. It seemed seedy and neglected but at least not replaced by a tower block.

The next obstacle was Cabo Creus with its off lying island, Isla Encalladora. It is located at the extreme eastern end of the Pyrenees. It is according to the Royal Cruising Club Pilot "*one of the most dangerous points on the whole of the east coast of Spain because it is in the centre of the NW tramontana which, with its seas, can be worse here than on any other section of the coast.*" They really know how to build up your confidence don't they?

Having studied the chart for possible Calas of refuge we set off and..... ran smack into a bank of really dense fog at the cape.

Nervously I sheered off, and we went into Cadaques and pinched a buoy. Of course we were promptly chased off but told where we could anchor. Had lunch and admired a very elegant Sorrento 32.

Later that day we tried rounding the Cape again and visibility was much better. We admired the magnificent foothills of the Pyrenees until we crossed into French waters once more, and on to Port Vendres which I loved. France again and it is so instantly different. Good bread, quiet Marianos, no shouting and a reasonable price, for the Med.

Tuesday 5th September - Port Vendres to Gruisson

Reluctantly we left Port Vendres and set out on our last leg to Gruisson where we thought we might leave ELISHA for the winter. The Navicom chartplotter chip ran out after Port Vendres and I had plotted GPS waypoints in the old way. As luck would have it the poor visibility which was a feature of our whole voyage came to say goodbye and provided an impenetrable bank of thick white fog so we crept up to the breakwater on radar. As we got closer to the waypoint we slowed right down to 5 knots until, out of the mist, yards away. the harbour wall emerged.

Gruisson is one of the many completely new 'artificial' port built by the French since the last war along this previously inhospitable and mosquito ridden coast. It was pleasant, totally sheltered, but deadly quiet now that the holidays are over.

After some debate I rang Phillipe at Cherbourg Plaisance and asked him what it would cost to truck ELISHA to him in Cherbourg. He came back with about £2,250. Loathe to leave the boat behind and conscious of the cost of leaving it there I took up the offer.

We didn't get ELISHA back to her berth in Lymington River until November which was not ideal to cross the Channel, but it was in retrospect the best solution.

Appendix 1 – The Route

3 rd May	Lymington	Braye (Alderney)	
4 th May	Braye	St Peters Port (Guernsey)	
5 th May	St Peters Port	Ploumanac'h	
6 th May	Ploumanac'h	L'Aberwrac'h	
7 th May	L'Aberwrac'h	Camaret	
8 th May	Camaret		
9 th May	Camaret		
10 th May	Camaret		
11 th May	Camaret		
12 th May	Camaret	Ile de Sein	
13 th May	Ile de Sein	Loctudy	
14 th May	Loctudy	Benodet	
15 th May	Benodet	Iles de Glenan	
15 th May	Iles de Glenan	Concarneau	
16 th May	Concarneau	Port Tudy (Ile de Groix)	
17 th May	Port Tudy	Lorient	
18 th May	Lorient	Port St Louis	
19 th May	Port St Louis		
23 th May	Port St Louis	La Palais (belle Isle)	
24 th May	La Palais	Port Crouesty	
25 th May	Port Crouesty		
26 th May	Port Crouesty		
27 th May	Port Crouesty		
28 th May	Port Crouesty	Ile aux Moines	
29 th May	Ile aux Moines	Vannes	
30 th May	Vannes	Port Crousty	
31 st May	Port Crouesty	Auray	
1 st June	Auray (St Goustan)	La Roche Bernard	
2 nd June	La Roche Bernard		
3 rd June	La Roche Bernard	Piriac Sur Mer	
4 th June	Piriac	Pornic	
5 th June	Pornic	Ile d'Yeu	
6 th June	Ile d'Yeu		
7 th June	Ile d'Yeu	Sable d'Olonnes	
8 th June	Sable d'Olonnes		
9 th June	Sable d'Olonnes		
10 th June	La Rochelle		
11 th June	La Rochelle	St Martins	
12 th June	St Martins		
13 th June	St Martins		
14 th June	St Martins	Royan	
15 th June	Royan	Arachon	
16 th June	Arachon		
17 th June	Arachon	Cap Breton	

18 th June	Cap Breton		
19 th June	Cap Breton	St Jean de Luz	
20 th June	St Jean de Lutz	Zumara	
21 st June	Zumara	Bilbao	
22 nd June	Bilbao		
23 rd June	Bilbao		
24 th June	Bilbao		
25 th June	Bilbao		
26 th June	Bilbao		
27 th June	Bilbao		
28 th June	Bilbao		
29 th June	Bilbao		
30 th June	Bilbao		
1 st July	Bilbao		
2 nd July	Bilbao		
3 rd July	Bilbao		
4 th July	Bilbao		
5 th July	Bilbao	Santona	
6 th July	Santona	Santander	
7 th July	Santander	San Vincente	
8 th July	San Vincente		
9 th July	San Vincente de la Barquera	Ribadessella	
10 th July	Ribadessela	Gijon	
11 th July	Gijon	Ridadeo	
12 th July	Ribadeo		
13 th July	Ribadeo	Viverio	
14 th July	Viverio	Corruna	
15 th July	Corruna		
17 th July	Corruna		
18 th July	Corunna		
20 th July	Corunna	Portosin	
21 st July	Portosin		
22 nd July Saturday	Portosin		
23 rd July Sunday	Bayonna		
24 th July Monday	Bayonna		
25 th July Tuesday	Bayonna (Baiona)	Viana del Castello	
26 th July Wednesday	Viana del Castello	Povoa de Varzim	
28 th July	Povoa de Varzim		
29 th July	Povoa de Varzim	Leixoes	
30 th July	Leixoes	Figuera de Foz	
31 st July	Figuera de Foz		
1 st August	Figuera de Foz	Peniche	
2 nd August	Peniche		
3 rd August	Peniche		
4 th August	Peniche	Cascais	
5 th August	Cascais		
6 th August	Cascais	Sines	
7 th August Monday	Sines	Lagos	

8 th August	Lagos	Alvor	
9 th August	Alvor	Vilamoura	
10 th August	Vilamoura	Tavira	
11 th August	Tavira	Mazagon	
12 th August	Mazagon	Cadiz	
13 th August	Cadiz		
14 th August	Cadiz	Santa Maria	
15 th August	Santa Maria		
16 th August	Santa Maria	Barbate	
17 th August	Barbate		
18 th August	Barbate	Soto Grande	
19 th August	Soto Grande		
20 th August	Soto Grande		
21 st August	Soto Grande		
22 nd August	Soto Grande		
23 rd August	Soto Grande		
24 th August	Soto Grande	Log 4655	
25 th August	Soto Grande	Marina del Este (anchored)	
26 th August	Marina del Este	Puerto Genoves (& San Hose)	
27 th August	Puerto Genoves	Puerto de Torre viega	
27 th August	Puerto de Torre viega	Calpe	
28 th August	Calpe	Formentera. I Espalmador	
29 th August	I Esplamador	Cala Llonga	
30 th August	Cala Llonga	Cala de San Vicente	
31 st August	Cala de San Vicente	Cala Portinatx	
1 st September	Ibiza Cala Portinatx	Palma	
2 nd September	Palma	Puerto Olympia	
3 rd September	Puerto Plympia	L'Estartit	
4 th September	L'Estartit	Port Vendres	
5 th September	Port Vendres	Gruissan	

Appendix 2 – Notes

Summary

We left Lymington 3rd May 2006 and arrived Gruissan 5th September. We had done 2,803 nautical miles and logged 205 engine hours. When we set out sea temperature was 16.5 C and in Gruissan it was 29.9 C. We used 5,913 litres of diesel. So overall average 2.2 litres a mile. Or 0.474 miles per litre, or about 3.37 miles per gallon.

The cost of diesel was about £6,000. At first it seems an awful lot. However we couldn't have done the trip any other way and it works out about £375 a week. Add food and moorings and cost was about £500 a week for two.

I had planned to return through the Canal du Midi. However the height limitations of some of the bridges and the time it would take decided me against it

The Atlantic

The Atlantic coast is beautiful and wild. Pilotage is critical as are proper charts and pilot books. Harbours are usually welcoming, people are kind and helpful and you meet like minded people far from home.

The Mediterranean

The Mediterranean is quite different. It really starts at Lagos when you round Cape St Vincent and turn east for Gibraltar.

The horrid pests known as Marianos appear. Prices for marinas double. People are not friendly and moorings are crammed. I appreciate it was August when we were there.

Marianos

Our first experience of the Marianos was in Lagos, Portugal. Up to then we moored ourselves quite happily. Sometimes a well meaning yachties would take a rope but I have always preferred to be left alone to sort myself out. Once you have given a rope to someone else you have lost control of the boat. They may tie it to the downwind cleat, or too short. In Spain in particular this will be accompanied with hoarse loud cries of "No, No", and other expressions, they have taken you over.

The Marianos are it seems a feature of the rich south. They wear smart shorts and tops, moor your boat and generally look after it. It took some time to dawn on me that they also expect a tip when they, quite unnecessarily, take you ropes, grabbing them out of Elisha's hand as if she, who had moored us all the way down the Atlantic coast, was incapable.

I came to realise that they were generally a sign of an expensive mooring as well! The Marianos have their own ideas about how you will moor. They shout as you come alongside in the calmest weather as if a crisis was impending, which only their efforts can avert. To my suppressed fury in Puerto Olimpico, as I came alongside the reception berth and allowed the wind to blow us gently on, fenders all in position, a hoarsely shouting marianos grabbed the top of the guard rails and exerted all his strength to stop the boat coming in. I could see the rail bending and shouted at him to leave it but of course he could not understand and doubtless felt he knew better than me. The guard rail was OK but could have snapped or been bent and who would have paid for that? He was sulky not to get a tip.

He appeared again at our allotted space where there was a cross wind, shouting as he saw me apparently backing into the boat upwind of our space, yelling as he had decided we should come in bow first. I ignored him and we berthed fine. Instantly he is on board pulling up the lazy line and running up the deck with it as if by his actions rescuing us from our folly.

Marianos look after boats. I was astonished having met self sufficient yachties, mostly on budgets, all the way down, to see in Lagos at 0730 Marianos coming down to the boats. They cleaned them, hosed them, hoovered them, checked oil, ran up the engines, checked and ran up the Personal Water craft, loaded wine and food. So the owners with girl friends or families strolled down about 0930, got on and went. A style of boating I was new to. I felt one of the lower classes alright as I checked my own engine oil.

Marina Electrical Connections

As you get south and boats get bigger the normal 'caravan' type electrical connections start to become the bigger plug type. Adaptors are not too hard to get and often they will rent them to you.

After Gibraltar though it changes. Marinas start deliberately fitting unique connections to ensure you do not use their power without paying. To make matters worse they rent you the plug BUT unconnected. This means you have to wire, and unwire the following day, a plug each time you stop. We got used to doing without shore power. Not only is this most inconvenient but it seems to me dangerous. How many people really know how to correctly wire unlabelled plugs?

Maintenance

I have always preferred to do my own maintenance. It is tedious and messy but at least I know exactly what has been done, and of course it costs less.

Away from home I feel boatyards are of unknown competence. They all swear they are Volvo agents, or have Volvo trained engineers which may, or may not, be true. Due to modern taxes and employment laws most small businesses are unwilling to employ people so the man wearing overalls with Volvo emblazoned on them may well be casual labour. There is a strong tendency to give routine jobs to 'the lad'. So 'simple' tasks such as oil changes and filter changes can be messed up.

In Brittany I asked for the Volvo agent to change the propeller anodes. When his 'lad' turned up it became evident that he had never worked on an outdrive duoprop before and indeed they are very, very rare on that coast. He had not the tools, or parts, or expertise. I sent him away and did it myself. Discovering well out at sea the job has been botched is exasperating and dangerous.

Safety

We had lifejackets, Bombard inflatable as a liferaft, inshore flares pack and fire extinguishers. Of course DSC radio and GPS. Elisha was very keen on the DSC Radio. I had instructed her in the procedure to make a Pan Pan or Mayday call, but as he pointed out she seldom had any idea where we were if they asked for her position. The idea that the GPS linked radio would automatically send out co-ordinates greatly comforted her.

Hazards

The biggest non natural hazards are, without doubt fishing floats. For some reason the French, Spanish and Portuguese are building completely new fishing ports with European money. I think it is just to keep otherwise unemployable men in poor areas from rioting. Thousands of very small boats consequently set pots along the coast with, apparently, no regulation at all.

In France it is not too bad, in Spain it is quite bad but the markers are at least of a reasonable size, in Portugal it is really terrible with poor markers and sometimes impenetrable crowds of floats barring your way, often interconnected. I am astonished no deaths have been attributed to them because entering harbours in a swell and getting ropes round your props is very nasty.

Yachts don't sail at night on these coasts, it is just too hazardous. You have to get 30 miles out to sea to be safe from these pests if you must sail at night.

The fishing boats themselves are like fishing boats everywhere intent, on their living and uninterested in such niceties as 'rules of the road'. Stay alive, keep clear of them.

Weather

Bad Visibility and Swell are the problems. For those of us not familiar with swell it can be very difficult to visualise what sea state you will find. The forecast gives sea condition and wave height and, separately, swell direction and height. How do they interact? It depends on the depth of water and other factors and I never grasped it. Swell can pile into bays and seems to go round corners so what would look like shelter isn't. With apparently similar forecasts we would have a miserable time one day, and a flat and easy run another.

Visibility is a major issue. I think we were unlucky but on the north Spanish coast it was never good and sometimes just awful. Apart from navigation it was disappointing to be unable to see the majestic Pyrenees and Picos Mountains. Visibility was never really good until we reached the Mediterranean and even there we hit some bad fog which I didn't think happened.

The Roof

The sliding hardtop on the Jeanneau is a wonderful idea, now much copied. Keep out the waves and rain but also an excellent and necessary protection against the sun. However we had constant trouble with it from the beginning. Catching a wave, or a wake, at the wrong angle would cause the heavy sliding section to lift off and crash back damaging the runners as in the picture. Jeanneau fixed it three times and I fixed it about four times. When this happened the roof became a dangerous sliding guillotine in heavy sea or swell and difficult to control. In the end we had to rope it in the open position when we went to sea for safety.

All Jeanneau and I were doing was fixing the symptom so I got a marine surveyor to report. He confirmed my suspicions that the hull was flexing sufficiently for the roof to come out it's runners and identified widespread cracking in the load bearing floor and bulkheads although the hull itself seems OK. Jeanneau refused to accept the surveyors report.



