

ISW 2014 - A wonderful week in France

The majority of the 40 or so Cornish Shrimpers to be found in France are located in and around one rather select small seaside town in northern Brittany; St Briac near St Malo. In this area of outstanding natural beauty the boats are sailed during the summer months by their owners when staying at their holiday homes. There is a very active yacht club which organises several events weekly during July and August, and the AFPCC, the French association of Cornish Crabbers owners, comprises a large proportion of its members. It is this group of enthusiastic Shrimper and Crabber sailors which very generously offered to host the 2014 ISW.

In June 28 Shrimpers from Britain, Germany, Holland and Portugal, together with Trevor Thomas (who had crossed the channel in his 30 footer), joined a further 15 Shrimpers and Crabbers from France, to explore the beautiful waters of St Malo bay and the river Rance.

Initially daunting, taking a Shrimper on a trailer across on the ferry proved to be surprisingly easy and cost the same as taking a caravan. Once in France the roads to St Malo were excellent and (apart from the tiny streets leading to the harbour side at the end) the whole journey was uneventful.



On arrival in warm sunshine it was a real pleasure to meet up with fellow Shrimper owners and, as usual, plenty of help with rigging and launching was on hand.

For the week we were given marina accommodation at various harbours near to St Briac. There were good facilities even if, at St Malo and St Cast due to the enormous tidal range, the ramps leading down to the pontoons could be anything from horizontal to an Everest-like slope.

Our French hosts were very welcoming and always on hand when needed, and the organisation, from trailer storage to restaurant meals was excellent. Because one of the French Shrimper owners is a retired admiral and French regional Honorary Secretary, a particularly reassuring feature was the lifeboat that accompanied us wherever we went! It is also a measure of the generosity of our hosts that two French owners were willing to lend their boats for a week so that Karen Macey and David and Jean Cornhill could sail with us.

The week started well with a comprehensive English/French briefing and then an excellent dinner in a harbour restaurant decorated by a complete dragon sailboat hanging on the wall. It was immediately obvious that our hosts were enthusiastic fellow shrimper sailors and, in spite of the shortcomings of some participants' French or English, as the evening progressed and the (all included) wine flowed freely we were not short of conversation.



Leaving the marina at St Malo. Shrimpers are dwarfed by the huge ferry which had earlier brought a number of participants direct to the town.

The following morning saw the fleet motor out of harbour, and in light winds sail past the dramatic chateaux on the headlands, across Dinard bay and around the coast to St Briac where we anchored in bright sunshine for a picnic surrounded by delightful small islands with sandy beaches.



St Briac is associated with many famous people. On the headland behind is the mansion of John Kerry, American Secretary of State

Later we continued to berth at St Cast where we were able to walk along the promenade to explore the charming seaside town. Everywhere could be seen relaxed Shrimper owners, some eating ice creams or enjoying afternoon tea while others drank cold beers, and a holiday atmosphere was very prevalent. That evening we were spoiled for choice by the large number of restaurants.



By now the sun was beginning to get quite fierce and, perhaps unusually for an ISW, serious consideration was being given to sun awnings.

The following morning saw a race organised by the St Briac yacht club and about 25 shrimpers (and a couple of crabbers) took part. While good-natured and initially relaxed, it soon became obvious that a certain amount of international competition was creeping in and crews started to concentrate

much harder. The eventual winner was a Frenchman (obviously benefitting from some local knowledge) but participants agreed it had been a good competitive race in ideal conditions. In the afternoon some people went for another sail while others enjoyed a Sunday afternoon exploring the local area on foot in glorious sunshine.



St Cast marina and Andy Mullins makes some last minute adjustments to his keel. All to no avail, a French boat won the race.

The next day we awoke to quite a choppy sea with a headwind for the trip back to St Malo. The tide was also falling. As time was tight we were advised not to attempt sailing, but to leave by 10am at the latest and motor the ten miles back. A number of skippers announced that they hadn't come all this way to go motoring, and immediately departed at 8am determined to sail the whole way. At this sight, just about everyone else shortly followed suit. Although the wind was moderate, for a while the sea was very unsettled and just motoring out of the marina our boat buried its bowsprit several times. Perhaps we should have listened to advice but eventually everyone reached St Malo safely. In the afternoon there was a guided tour of the walled city.

Tuesday morning, shepherded by our hosts, we sailed round to the Rance dam with its big lock, and the first group of boats went in following a large pleasure boat crowded with hundreds of children. As the gates opened again the pleasure boat started its engines and the propellers produced a powerful blast of water which rushed into the confined space behind. The lead shrimper's line was torn from the grasp of its crew and the boat swept back onto the following dozen boats which also broke free and piled up at the back. The resulting chaos brought screams of laughter from the already excited children and shouts of dismay from the lock keeper. Finally the waters calmed and order was restored although it had been an exciting couple of minutes! The second group, warned about what had happened, managed the transit with less drama.



At the Rance dam every hour the traffic on the dual carriageway is stopped causing long queues as the huge lock bridge is opened.

We were led upriver by the RIB.

With a gentle wind we then continued up the Rance to an inlet where a reception committee from a local historical organisation was waiting to show us around an ancient dry-dock. Once again French generosity was abundantly evident when drinks, local produce and cakes were thrust upon us. We had a delightful and interesting lunch break.

After lunch the skies brightened and the wind picked up until about 35 boats were briskly running and filling the width of the widening but still confined stretch of water. It was exhilarating racing along surrounded by such a large number of boats. The plan was to take photographs of the Shrimper fleet which had now split into two groups. Over the radio came the instructions for the leading half to slow down to enable the second half to catch up for a photo. Not so easy when running, so most of the lead group decided to tack back, and then got into a melee with the followers, who then tried to dodge out of their way. A re-run of the battle of Trafalgar looked imminent but luckily there were no collisions and the resulting photos were quite spectacular.



The small photos don't really do justice to the dramatic scene as we went under the bridges. Trevor was concerned that there might not be enough clearance for his mast. He needn't have worried.



Further upriver we arrived at a tiny marina at Plouer where we were to stay the night. That evening our hosts had arranged a 'Gallettes' picnic of savoury and sweet pancakes and an endless supply of bottles of sparkling cider. A large number of AFPCC members came out to join us and, chatting in the warm bright evening sunshine with a beautiful view across the river, a very convivial evening ensued.

After a good night's sleep in the quiet little marina, we continued in glorious sunshine up river to the second lock at Le Chatelier.



Passing through this lock proved much easier although now we were all very careful. So much so that the lock keeper started to get concerned at the time we were taking and the amount of traffic held up on the busy road above.

From Le Chatelier on, the river is non-tidal and much narrower, and we all gently motored onwards through a picture-postcard landscape of old water mills and farmhouses. The sight of a convoy of Shrimpers in rural France was obviously unusual and strollers smiled and waved to us from the towpath. Eventually after lots of twists and turns we arrived at the tiny port of Dinan.



Arrival at Dinan. Karen at the helm of loaned French Shrimper 'Petit Jardin' with ever-helpful organiser Loic de Guichen on hand to organise berthing.

We berthed in a perfect location alongside the historic quay. Everyone then went off to explore the fascinating medieval town with its many shops before another very pleasant evening when, after cockpit aperitifs, many ate on the terrace of a restaurant nearby. Once again, a very warm evening.



Dinan quayside was delightful! Although next to a small road it was surprisingly quiet once night had fallen and we slept well.

On a sparkling morning, after a breakfast on the boat of coffee and fresh croissants, it was time to head back down river through the beautiful scenery. This time the locks were passed without major incident and we returned to the marina in St Malo where, under what felt like a merciless sun, some of us who needed to get home early collected our trailers and proceeded to retrieve our boats on

the huge slipway. There then ensued a rush to pack things away before getting showered and dressed in something suitable for the final supper.

A number of fortunate crews were, however, prolonging their stay as the weather promised to remain fine. They were planning to explore further up the Rance, go to southern Brittany and up the river Odet to Quimper, or explore the Gulf of Morbihan.

That evening, arriving at the Hotel Chateaubriand inside the walled city, we were surprised to find that we were to be entertained at the most prestigious venue in the town! After a champagne reception, there were speeches and a grand prize presentation when everyone was included.



The presentation of the racing cup.
Further champagne is on ice behind.

We then went into the dining room to discover that the evening's menu was the same as had been presented to her Majesty the Queen on her state visit to France the week before! As the wine again flowed freely we thoroughly enjoyed our closing dinner in such elegant surroundings with our charming hosts.



The climax of a wonderful meal was the arrival of a specially decorated 'Shrimpers cake' complete with candles. Amazing!

The following morning, again under a cloudless sky, there was an atmosphere of unreality. We were reluctantly going home having spent a sunny, warm ISW without a drop of rain, with pleasant breezes, surrounded by stunning scenery and above all enjoying such a generous welcome that it left us smiling and shaking our heads almost in disbelief. What a wonderful week!

The above description is just a snapshot to attempt to describe some of the many, many experiences we enjoyed during a week that seemed to cater for everyone. The whole event was a huge success and we are all grateful for the help and attention, the meticulous planning and the generosity of our French hosts. Merci!!

