

Shrimpers in Portugal – by Sarah & Martin Pumphrey

Three Shrimpers and a Crabber 22 were invited by Carlos & Diana Gomes (*Crevette -730*) to make the trip to Lisbon. They will be known to many of you as they have made the journey from Portugal with their Shrimper to join in several Shrimper Weeks, including Friesland, Falmouth (for our 25th anniversary) and the Morbihan.



Robin Whittle, Bryn Bird and I, along with Claud Lanyon who is well known for being prepared to tow his Crabber 22 long distances, were keen to go but suggested that we make it an autumnal trip (October 2008). It was with some trepidation that I booked with Brittany Ferries in Plymouth, anxious lest we might find the occasion not worth the effort in getting there. I could not have been more wrong. It was the best decision and we were given the trip of a lifetime by Carlos and Diana.

The ferry crossing took 26 hours with cabin, good dinner and *Mamma Mia*, then we were in Spain and rolling in the company of Claud and Sheila en route for Lisbon. The next morning we rolled into Belém Marina escorted by Carlos, who had intercepted us on the motorway. The boatyard had us rigged and in the water in no time. Bryn and Sue Heath-Downey arrived two days later, having crossed from Southampton to Bilbao and made a detour to along the north coast to Santiago de Compostela and Oporto. Robin and Gillie arrived the next day to Cascais after an amazing 10 hours direct from Bilboa, looking fresh and ready for supper.

Meanwhile Sarah and I had three days sailing out to sea from Lisbon in conditions that for Cornwall would have been too hot. By using the tide it is an easy sail to Cascais some 12 miles to the west (or a beach in between) and back in the afternoon.

Now we were all gathered in Cascais, along with a Shrimper owned by Hugo and Maria, local to Lisbon. The next day Carlos took us on a tour of the coast to Point Roca, the most westerly mainland point of Europe. A spectacular view 140m above the rocks below, then on into Sintra, a



hillside retreat for those with houses commuting into Lisbon, and favourable cool climate in the hot days of summer. Here too is the Pena National Palace perched at 530m in the clouds. We were treated to a breathtaking tour of this massive building, 19th-century Portuguese Romanticism with Moorish and Manueline influence. Latterly it was a summer palace occupied up to 1910 by the last Royal, Don Manuel II, and is rather creepily furnished as if they were about to return!

Back to real life and a 12-mile sail to Belém through the spectacular approach to the Tagus River with sluicing tide, sandbanks with surf, castles and hazardously anchored boats fishing by dragging nets up to the anchor with manual winches. Belém Marina made a good base for a week but interestingly was very busy with the coastal train 100 yards away, flight path to Lisbon Airport overhead and a permanent buzz from the suspension bridge.

Shrimpers in Portugal

We made a day sail to Seixal, upstream and on the south side of the river, as an introduction to the open lagoon (15 miles long by 8 miles wide) upstream. A spirited sail with fresh wind and short seas for lunch ashore and a walk to a boat building exhibition. Lisbon is impressive, especially as it has a history of major earthquake, tsunami and serious fire in 1755. Carlos and Diana showed us around and then we split up and got thoroughly lost in the maze of tramways, cathedrals and castles. We visited Carlos's impressive shop, which has been in his family for 150 years: a six-storied building selling household linens of the highest qualities, an upmarket version of the London store Liberty's. We thought Carlos was justifiably proud of his family connection and hands on involvement.

We were invited to dinner at their home in Sintra one evening, when we were offered a classical Portuguese meal of their traditional fish dishes, cheeses and bread. It was a real treat and most beautifully served by them and a few close friends.



Carlos is making a model Shrimper at a 1:10 scale, and we were privileged to see it part completed. Built of end-on cedar strips, it is an accurate model that he will rig and equip with radio control. Believe me, it is a real work of art. Perhaps he can be persuaded to bring it to a Crabber Stand at a Boat Show one day.

We then set off up river for 10 days. Using the significant tidal flow, we covered the ground upstream past the city and its docks and under the two big bridges that are such a feature, along with a few power stations!

The Tagus lagoon is so large that in some places you cannot see land on the other side. However, the greater part of it is very shallow and so we followed the channel in a disciplined fashion, not wanting to be the first to run aground. Caution was thrown to the winds when a flock of flamingoes was spotted, but they were too canny to allow us to get too close.

Next day we sailed on, with a degree of competition creeping in as to who was in front. We were warned that nets set in the river to take elvers are a real navigational challenge, but the shallows hadn't really required attention at this stage. Carlos had given us a river pilot showing the channel as it was when charted, but we soon found that it was not foolproof. Since we were going upstream on the flood, there was no real worry about grounding so long as you got an anchor out quickly.

We were now between trees on a river some 400 yards wide. Lunch was taken anchored in the shelter of a stand of poplars and swimming was the order of the day for those not hugging a bucket! I think we all took it in turns to catch the bug - it was thought that life on a Shrimper or even a Crabber does not match up to Environmental Health and Hygiene standards!



The first of three nights was spent in a little elver fishing village called Salvaterra de Magos on pontoons that dried out happily into soft mud. Kingfishers flew ahead up the cut, egrets perched in the trees like handkerchiefs hung up to dry. Cormorants abounded, and the odd osprey and sea eagle were seen.

Shrimpers in Portugal

We had a Sunday off the boats to go to Evora by small bus - a good move to see the cork woods and the hinterland formed by the Tagus River. Evora is stunning and was blessed by the Romans with a Doric temple and spectacular aqueduct. A cathedral and monastery were also visited, along with a gruesome ossuary.

Lunch was taken in some style and I regret that some even broke into song. Very good meal: black pork featured, from pigs fed on acorns, I think. Returned via remote dolmen and standing stones. Back in the dark to simple supper on board for us.

Up river by sail to Valada, a small village with a rather full quay so we anchored off for the night, happily out of the fairway as we were woken by a large gravel barge 50 yards off working two cranes with draglines.

Since the tide was getting later, we had time to spend in Valada so beached the boats and went for coffee. The wind was strong and it was 10 degrees cooler - there was a change in the weather.

Once the sandbanks were covered by the new flood, which was, surprisingly, entirely fresh water, some put in two reefs and sailed, but power was easier in the narrower channels and so we passed under Muge Bridge, which Claud sensibly declined. We continued for 4 miles to a planned anchorage but returned to Claud. We were some 35 miles upstream of Lisbon and had seen a magical bit of river. Quite empty of traffic and utterly unspoilt. So clean that we washed up in it and swam without thought.

Back down river to below Valada and found good river anchorage for a quiet night, wind gone and fine sunset. We anchored quite close to shore, thinking of the nocturnal barge.

Lazy start, no distance to go and the sun had come out. We were too close to shore, Robin and Gillie said they heard musical noises from their

hull in the night.... They may have grounded the centreboard and heard methane bubbles moving round the hull?? We found our anchor fouled on a branch and lost anchor, chain and rope, which kept everyone entertained for an hour or so. Luckily we had two engineers here and they came up trumps at the bottom of the tide and recovered all gear, phew. Returned to Salvaterra for the night.

Made an early start to catch the ebb in oilskins. Wind on the nose, what little of it there was, so motored downriver to Vila Franca, where we were to catch a local train to visit the 1998 Expo site and go to the aquarium there. This was a great success as we were shown round by an enthusiastic member of staff. Memorable were the sea otters that live in the kelp off California. We all wanted to take one home.

Last day on the water, wind light but we sailed from below the Vasco da Gama bridge back to just short of Belém Marina. Last night so ate well in Lisbon and visited a Prado event, where traditional songs were sung to a 12-stringed guitar while port was drunk from large glasses.

We were craned out the next day and visited the Maritime museum with Claud and Sheila. The return drive the next day was improved by an overnight stop in a Parador in Salamanca - first comfortable bed for three weeks, and perfect halfway stop. Salamanca was lovely and we had three hours spare to walk around the very old university town.

Caught the ferry at Santander without event but were surprised by the snow on the mountains 50 miles south. It would seem that our timing for this holiday was perfect.

So many thanks go to Carlos and Diana for their immeasurable hospitality.

Sarah & Martin Pumphrey - *Salt Horse II (830)*