

Shrimpering on the Dutch Waddensea¹

At the end of the summer of 2009 I had sailed our 'Eb & Vloed' (Ebb & Flow, no. 726) in 3 days from our home town Almere (at the Ysselmeer, 20 miles NE of Amsterdam) to Oostmahorn, a hamlet in the north of the Netherlands. This place, with a basic but good marina would offer an excellent starting point for short trips on the eastern part of the Dutch Waddensea in the last two months of sailing-season 2009.

The waters east of the isle of Terschelling form the most shallow and sheltered part of the Dutch Waddensea, which UNESCO recently granted the World Heritage status. The tidal difference in the waters between the islands Ameland and Schiermonnikoog is about 9 ft. About 80% of this area dries out at ebttide, so trips to the isles have to be planned meticulously – even with the draught of a Shrimper. Around average high tide the swatchways of the flats and sands between the isles give a depth of 4-4,5 feet. Nes and Schiermonnikoog are tidal harbours. For a Shrimper, entering the quays or marina's of Nes (Ameland) and Schiermonnikoog² is roughly possible between 2,5 hours before and after high tide. In general, the shallowness of this area provides for good shelter and very few dash of the waves, even with strong winds. Only the wide outlets to the Northsea between the isles can be dangerous for small boats in some circumstances, especially with northern winds in combination with ebttide. The shallowness and tides of the Waddensea form an ideal environment for a Shrimper.



¹ 'Wad' means: shoal. 'Wadden' is the plural of 'wad'.

² 'Oog' is an old word for 'island', 'schier' for 'grey' and 'monnik' means 'munk'. From the eleventh century on the monks of the Cistercian order in their grey habits played a crucial role in reclaiming new land in the northern part of the Netherlands.

Friday late afternoon 'Eb & Vloed' beats up against a moderate E-wind from Oostmahorn to Lauwersoog. This artificially created fishing-port was built on the dike that closed the former Lauwerssea in 1969, when Lauwers-sea became Lauwers-meer (-lake). This is not a port that was created for romantic postcards and giddiness – people just make money here and you have to appreciate the mix of fishy smell and neon tubes flavoured with some noise of a generator – but on the other hand: in the back of the harbour, opposite to the drydock, you can always find the few feet for mooring your Shrimper to a floating jetty– or otherwise come alongside a small fishingboat. At the end of the pier is a restaurant called 'Pierenend', where you can eat fish for supper in an informal setting and enjoy a lovely view from your table on the Waddensea and Schiermonnikoog. We pass the lock and its bridge at 18.30h and come alongside a small blue steelbuilt shrimping-cutter for the night. No fishrestaurant for us this evening - supper gives an instant-goulashsoup from an anonymous chef and after dark Patricia and I make a stroll along the dike and see the flickering lighthouse of Schiermonnikoog – has any psychologist ever researched why a sense of placidity and calmness comes over you when seeing a burning lighthouse? The channel 23 VHF wheather forecast of 19.05 predicts a high above the Northsea and holds out a prospect of fine autumn-weather and for tomorrow a moderate E wind. Ameland, here we come!



High tide on Saturday is at 10.30h. Leaving at utmost 04.00 would be the best moment to profit from the ebbtide and sail to the entrance of the Wierumerwad, but sunrise is at 07.00, which prevents us from leaving earlier than 06.45. So we wake up at 06.00 and have breakfast - bacon, eggs and tea - in the yellow glow of a kerosene lamp. 'Rise' (no shine yet, to be honest) at this heroic time is because 'Eb & Vloed' has to pass two flat shoals today. First we will take the muddy 'Wierumerwad'-flats and later the 'Zuiderspruit', the swatchway between the shoals where the currents of flow meet each other behind the island of Ameland.

We made our usual (almost ritual) calculations for this trip and find out that in the last shoal that we will have to pass (the Zuiderspruit) high tide at 10.30 gives a depth of 2.08 m., and a mere 0.78 m at 15.00 – so this is our critical time today to reach the marina of Nes on Ameland with daylight. From the port of Lauwersoog we sail directly into the Zoutkamperlaag, in a NW direction. Soon two seals stick their head above the sea to see who are those chaps who are sailing in their dinnertable. An E 2 is not strong enough to push 'Eb & Vloed' up to the flood-tide, which is at full strength around this time. So the Honda 6HP is our best friend for a moment to reach the entrance of the Wierumerwad. With the draft of a Shrimper it is not necessary to follow the red and green buoys here during flow. High tide is still coming up so we just steer W with a moderate E wind now, to pick up the Zuiderspruit-swathway at the red buoy ZS36/P2. After this point ebbtide will help us – and 'Eb & Vloed' enters the marina of Ness shortly after 14.00h. The harbour-master is not present this afternoon, so we put the money for one night in an envelope in his postbox.



There is a bike rental service just opposite to the marina, a good opportunity to change boat for road and making a bike tour around the island. From a cultural-historical view Ameland belongs to the most interesting isles of the Dutch Waddensea. The villages of Nes, Hollum en Ballum have their origins in medieval times and their little streets still show many small houses dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Very characteristic for Ameland are the old houses of the former commanders of whaling-ships. The old brickstone small churches with typical 'saddle-roof' towers are even older. Most are from the 12th century, on the place of an even older wooden chapel. These buildings belong to the oldest heritage of early Christianity in the Northsea area. On our way back to the marina we lay in some fresh food in a shop, to compensate for our industrial supper of yesterday.



The VHF 23 on Sunday morning 07.00 gives a moderate wind from NW in the course of the day! That's perfect! However, when we leave Nes a few minutes after sunrise there is some fog and no wind at all, and the Honda has to bring us to the entrance of the Zuiderspruit - where the promised NW wind begins to blow. After a marvellous sailing trip we enter Lauwersoog again at 13.00.



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