

Snape to Redon, around the coast of France 2013

The planning for the 3 month voyage started in the previous year. Christmas presents consisted of charts, pilot books, almanac, log book etc. How to pack the limited space on the Shrimper with all the essential things we would need was discussed at length. We were fortunate in that we could do a one-way trip. Bryn was going to trail Gwendoline home after doing some sailing on it himself, from our final destination. We wanted to sail around the coast of France as far as we could get without going through any canals. The Chanel Islands were a must and I was keen to revisit the islands off southern Brittany as well as the Morbihan. We were not sure how far we would get, I had had hazy thoughts of Spain. The overriding aim was to enjoy ourselves and sail when the weather was favourable.

Des raided his shed which yielded old charts and some 1970s Adlard pilot books. I vetoed the bulky Channel Pilots written for shipping. He found an old sail which we could use for extra power when down wind sailing and he borrowed Cygnet's (a Thames barge) kedge anchor and some heavy chain for the large fierce tides in northern Brittany. This was the best thing we took ensuring many peaceful nights sleep, knowing we were safe from the dreaded scenario of the anchor dragging! He made some little legs which just attached to the bilge keels, and did not take up too much space in the back locker. These proved very successful. He jumped overboard just as we were taking the ground and fitted them and we settled level. They were tied on just in case they became detached when we floated so we did not lose them. If we were sailing on the next tide he removed them while he could still stand up. We always strap a fender board to the deck which doubles as a mast lowering A frame, or a gang plank.

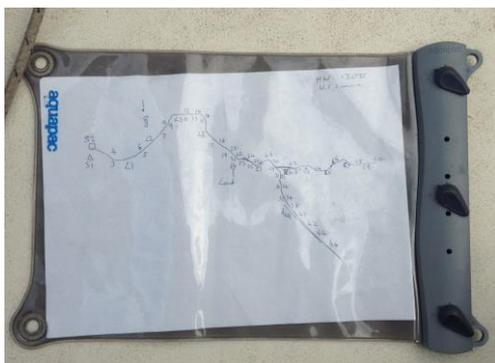
I collected take away containers for small items which stacked neatly inside the old battery case in the forward locker. Large charts lay against the hull, as well as plastic pockets containing the ships papers and other manuals etc. Every inch of space was used to store things and spares were packed for emergencies, even a piece of plywood in case we holed on a rock!! A good selection of tinned and dried food was taken as shopping can be a nightmare sometimes, as well as individual sweet treat bars and dried fruit and small cartons of long life milk and fruit juices. We were looking forward to buying the French wine but took enough to get us there. I invested in a mini ipad, for taking photos, writing the diary, going online to get the all important forecasts etc.

The boat was thoroughly gone over and any repairs done, the sails had been new the previous year. Eventually the boat was carefully stacked with all the accumulated stores, equipment and extra tools, not forgetting the French courtesy flag, by which time it was looking very low in the water, oh well it would mean we would be more stable! The weather was awful and we did not get to go out of the river until the trip actually started, which was 20th May 2013.

We left Snape and got to Pin Mill the first day, then waited a day as the weather was awful and sailed across the Channel on Wed 22nd starting at 02.15. There was lots of traffic but all was well. There was a sudden increase in the wind as

we approached Calais, but we were safely in at 17.00 and had to wait for the bridge to enter the harbour. We were woken the next morning by the sound of hail! The adventure had started and we had “frites on the beach”, something Des had been looking forward to, as it was a treat he used to have a child when they sailed their 1930s yacht Almida, which was their home, to France in the summer.

24th May. The next port was St Valérie-sur-Somme, a tricky entrance which had to be timed to perfection as the whole estuary dries and the buoyage is very complicated. I drew a paper map which we had in a waterproof pocket on deck



so we could be sure we took each buoy in order. We were in Calais harbour ready to leave at 18.00 in a tremendous downpour but we did not get the green light until 19.10. The sun did not set till 22.30 due to French time and the rain stopped. We did watches through the night, and the wind again blew up as we were at the tricky entrance to the Somme. To make matters more difficult the wind increased and it

was a bit hectic but the chartlet paid off and we arrived safely, having sailed 60M. St Valérie is a pretty place with a steam train running through the street, which we too to Cayeux.

27-28th May. It was 30M to Dieppe which was an overnight trip to use the 10 meter tides, and SE wind. I thought it would be easy to buy a French sim for my ipad but, one phone shop did not have any sims, (may be they sold bread!) and at the other the complications were immense! However the deli shops were great and home cooked casseroles were easy to buy, just ready to heat up on the boat. We found this a good option throughout the trip as often we found restaurant food disappointing, no vegetables but lots of chips!

30th May. The next stop was Honfleur, and we left at 02.40 arriving 16.30 having sailed 67M. We were given our own pontoon because we were so small and as we arrived an English brass band started playing on the quay! Honfleur was a fascinating place with ancient tall buildings, all different surrounding the Vieux Basin.



1st June. Next was a 32M day sail to Ouistreham and then straight up to the canal to Caen, in sunshine for a change. The town was noisy being a Saturday night so the next day we went back down the canal to Ouistreham where we got wind bound for a couple of days, but it was a nice peaceful place with a big beach. It was frustrating as the wind was fair NE but too strong at F6.

We were aware that we needed a reasonable window of weather to make the 67M trip to Cherbourg as there were few bolt holes and if we did take one it would mean a long beat to get away from later. Des had particularly wanted to sail to Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches and go inside the blocks that were put there to form the artificial harbour in the war, but the conditions were not safe to do this when we set off on Wed 5th June. The forecast was 5-6 decreasing 4 at times with coastal reports for the Channel only F4, so we decided to go at 03.00 and the waves were big after the blow and the wind still strong as well as a mist so this was a big disappointment for Des. We also had to make it to the northerly tip before the tide turned against us, we motor sailed for stability and steerage and got one wave in the cabin as we had not shut the hatch properly! There was no going back and I prayed the wind did not increase any more, but we made it round Cap de Barfleur at 12.30 and turned west with a strong westerly flow to help us, eventually heading south to see the massive Napoleonic walls of Cherbourg harbour with much relief.

6th June. The next morning while we were still in bed we were visited by the customs! They were charming and really wanted to see what life was like on such a small boat! We did some shopping, I bought plenty of veg as I felt in much need! We did not get our much needed rest as there was a violent thunderstorm at 03.30! However we had a couple of days there as again the weather was foul. The underwater museum was excellent and you could look round the Redoubtable submarine. I had an amusing time in the launderette showing a French girl how to operate the complicated paying system, (which I had managed to fathom out with much difficulty)!! Much time again was spent planning the next potentially difficult leg, the infamous Alderney Race. All pilots and tidal flow charts were poured over at length and the advice compared. The departure time was calculated for each potential day but we would not be able to go if it got round to being in darkness.

10th June. Eventually the wind fell light and was behind us. The anticipation of these things is always worse than the reality, well if you choose the right conditions! A large amount of yachts had set off that morning as it was the first weather window for a while and gradually we converged to round the Cap de la Hague, at the precise time the stream came favourable 13.25. It was choppy and confused but we were whisked round and headed southwards towards Guernsey. We had decided to take the little Russell Channel which seemed quite difficult to identify despite the pre planning, but eventually the buoys came into view and all became clear. The small GPS was a comfort to know we were on track as well as telling us our speed and distance travelled. The day marks were all different with stripes and diamonds so there was no mistaking them. When we got to St Peter Port the big yachts were rafted up and we went on the outside. Because we were the shallowest draught we were ushered in first over the sill and we were sipping our wine while the others were fiddling with fenders, so all their speed was for naught as the last was first!!

We stayed a week there only venturing out once to quickly dash over to Herm and anchor briefly in Shell Bay, the weather was not good and we were glad to be

back in port. There was plenty to do and we spent a pleasant time there taking a bus trips round the island, and enjoying English beer once again!



16th June Left at 10.00 and thought we would visit Sark but there was no way we could anchor in the swell so



carried on to Jersey. We were settled in St Helier marina by 21.00 but we were not impressed and worse it was £23.

17th June The next night we thought we would lay at anchor in the bay finding some shelter on the St Aubin side, however this proved very difficult as there was no depth so we went to the other with water coming over the bows and drenching us. Eventually we found a little shelter but did not have a good night.

18th June. We were keen to get away as soon as possible and left at 06.40 we were on course for the Îles Chausey which were apparently a large outcrop of rocks most of which covered at HWS. However there were plenty of visible rocks



and we sailed into a beautiful little harbour to anchor for lunch, where there was a Chasse Marie, the Cancalaise anchored, with a party on board. Soon they hoisted the sails one by one, then they weighed the anchor and sailed right round us! On the next leg we had a big school of dolphins playing and jumping round the

boat for ages which was fantastic. We sailed happily into St Malo, a wonderful place and spent a relaxing day in the old walled city.



20th June. Set off at 05.00 as getting light, lining up the leading lights astern and followed the buoys out with some difficulty, on course for Grand Lejon lighthouse. It was foggy with no wind, we were motoring and saw nothing apart from when we neared the big high headland of Cap Fréhel. We crossed the Anse de Paimpol with a fair wind and entered through the inshore passage to the Île de Bréhat. It was mid-tide and there were rocks everywhere, about to cover with the tide. We managed to navigate through a narrow channel into the Trieux River with much relief, the scenery reminiscent of the Fal. We sailed under Lézardrieux suspension bridge and as we did not know how it would dry decided to pick up a mooring. We did some shopping in the sweet little town and headed off up the river with the rising tide. The huge tide had exposed lots of rocks on either side which were marked well with huge

Napoleonic brick beacons. We got to Pointrieux lock early but we tied up by 17.00, a relief not to have to worry about the tide. It was a lovely relaxing place with an English pub with a little music festival and lots of hippy types.



25th June. It is always a bit strange going back out to sea when you have spent a few days tucked up in some harbour. The forecast was F4 variable and we set off in swirling mist punching the flood in order to pick up the fair tide later and got some fishing net round the prop which was very difficult to get off. The mist cleared and we sailed up the Grand Channel to have a look at

Port de la Corderie on the Île-de-Brehat but did not stop. We turned off the channel to head north with a strong fair tide to La Moise beacon where the sea was a bit confused, then Les Heaux-de-Brehat lighthouse and motored through the North Channel towards La Jument and straight to the Sept Isles, another rocky outcrop, (there are loads scattered all along this coast) where some classic boats had anchored for lunch. We decided to go to the Lanion River and passed close inshore between the rocks off Trebeurden into the shallow entrance just 5' and picked up a mooring at Le Yaudet just scraping the bottom to anchor in the pool when the tide rose enough. It was a lovely and relaxing spot.

26th June we sailed towards Morlaix having digested copious amounts of information regarding the difficult entry amid the thousands of rocks. Luckily the conditions allowed us time to check our trusty Adlard, who we still found the most helpful in these situations and one by one we identified the marks but the daymark was almost obscured by trees now, but just visible when much closer. We anchored to wait for the tide to take the river up to Morlaix and found lots of classic boats of all types arriving. They were going to a classic boat festival and we were packed into the lock with them, like a shrimp sandwich and they



ushered us to a berth! Later when I went to pay they said oh no the festival was free and we were part of it! So we had 3 free nights and explored the ancient town with its impressive viaduct. We had a big shop delivered to the boat which was very useful.

30th June. We left in calm and fog so just went round to Roscoff old harbour, 12M to dry out

with our legs. We settled well and walked across the sand to the old town. We ate aboard and floated again, while studying arrows and entering waypoints. The legs stayed on and we settled again just fine.

1st July. Left harbour under sail 10.40 and anchored in Porz Kernock harbour on the Ile de Batz. There was a big swell at sea but little wind, and twice the fog came in thick and we were worried about navigating the difficult entrance but luckily the fog cleared and we picked our way in, having seen the tall La Vierge lighthouse from 4 miles away above the fog bank. We picked up a mooring but next morning the harbourmaster charged us 12.40 euros, we complained it was only 5 at Roscoff! The weather had turned bad so we headed up to the top of the river to shelter till it improved. The bridge was at Tregonlou and after drying out then saw a pool where we would stay afloat, so we moved over on the next tide.

6th July. Up at 04.30 but thick fog forecast so motored down the river in the dark and fog. There was still swell at sea and we passed the Petit Pot de Beurre and up river to Port de Paladin for a look then sailed round to L'Aber Wrac'h and into the marina and a nice meal ashore. We were now poised for the next tricky leg, through the Chanel du Four, full of dangers according to the books. Timing was the key as usual, and the day was lovely, a perfect NE2. We headed for the Libenter buoy then set course to clear Corn-Carhai lighthouse before altering course for Le Four Lighthouse which was abeam at 08.45 There was a slight mist but we were able to see Ushant as we passed through the Channel. We passed



between
Pointe St
Mathieu
and Les
Vieux
Moines
rock,
passing
Le
Conquet
harbour.



We sailed on to Camaret, and found some small classic boats doing a parade of sail in the harbour. The weather was sunny and warm now.



7th July. Left 11.00 with good sailing NE3 wind round Point de Toulinguet then went between 2nd and 3rd Tas de Pois rocks La Fourche and le Dentelé, as I had done in the sail round from Brest in 1996.

We lost the wind round Cap de la Chèvre point but picked it up again and caught our first 2 mackerel. We sailed onto visitor's pontoon in Douarnenez after a good day.





8th July. Des went to explore the Thames barge the Northdown which was under wraps there . We had spent loads of time discussing, reading about and planning the most daunting leg of our trip, the passage through the Raz de Sein. The almanac and pilot books made it sound terrifying and the thing that was imperative was be abeam of the exact tip at high slack water with just a 15 minute

window either side. This would be at 05.45 the precise time it got light, which would mean the 15M sail to reach it would be done in the dark, but at least we would see La Platte lighthouse on the end.

9th July Set off at 01.30 on a run with stars but no moon. We could see Ole de Sein from the start but was ages before Tevennec (quick flasher) was in sight. We were motoring as well to be sure of getting there at the right moment and we were abeam of La Platte at precisely at 05.45 as the sky lightened but the lighthouse was still lit. All the land appeared and there were fishing boats right in the dangerous channel the water was a bit confused but soon we were being



whisked with the strengthening fair tide round the southern side and on our SE course. We were much relieved but still had 40+M to go and the wind was strong easterly so I headed up as much as possible and after the effect of the headland the wind came more NE as forecast. We rounded Pointe de Penmarche and headed east towards Loctudy. We had lunch off the entrance as we waited for the tide, however

apparently yachts are not allowed to enter between 16.30 and 18.30 when the fishing fleet returns. The harbour was very chaotic with sailing dinghies and moored boats so we sought some peace in the sheltered left hand branch of the Pont L'Abbé river and found seclusion and warm sun, with just enough depth to stay afloat, my favourite place I think, particularly after the stress of the "Raz"!

12th July. Summer was really here and we sailed to the Îles de Glénan for a lunchtime swim, in clear white sand anchorage, then to Bénodet for the night and up to Quimper to



have a look the next day.

14th July, Bastille Day. We were in Concarneau and this was a big mistake. We were prohibited from anchoring anywhere in the vicinity of the harbour and 3 other English yachts were also shooed off to their fury, they said they had been anchoring there for years. So we spent an uncomfortable night at anchor some miles away.



16th July. After visiting the Aven River we headed for the Île de Groix and swam in rocky anchorage, then headed to Locmaria where the conditions were much more benign than when I had been before and the entrance seemed easy to find. It is a sparsely populated island and the next day I walked over to the main harbour at Port Tudy and Des sailed round and scooped me off the end of the harbour wall and we were off to Lorient. It is a busy commercial port with a narrow entrance by the fort. We headed up river to see the UBoat pens, which was quite an eerie experience. The next day we went to the top of the Blavet river which became beautiful and peaceful and stopped on a trot at Hennebont. The heat was really getting to me now.

19th July. We headed out of harbour towards Etel river which sounds a very difficult place with shifting sands, but the wind was not good for getting there so we changed our minds and went to Belle Isle and into the drying harbour of Sauzon, and attached our legs. We had caught 2 big mackerel on the way so ate them while admiring the pretty harbour with its multi coloured houses. We spent a couple of days there in what was one of our favourite places and enjoyed some swimming.



21st July. We left after lunch when we floated and had a look at Le Palais harbour before sailing over to Houat. It is a flat sandy island with little shelter and the wind got up in the night and stayed westerly meaning the

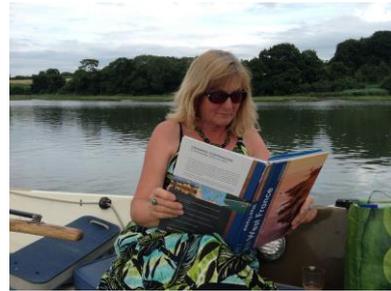
waves were coming in and we were on a lee shore, it was forecast to have gone round to the north.

We were unable to sleep so headed out of the anchorage at 02.30 but had to wait till daylight to see our way safely through the rocks. When we could see we headed for the Morbihan and caught 2 lovely mackerel. The wind now turned NW and we tacked as we must not get to the entrance before 13.00 when the flood starts. The tide runs 8kns in the narrow entrance, and I had experienced it before. We were whisked in and headed up the river D'Auray and anchored inside the moorings at Kercado.





We spent a happy week exploring many of the anchorages and places in the



Morbihan, one of the highlights being sailing to the very top of the Noyal river,

in the far east, which has no marks at all. We were only able to do this for the final part with the help of Google Earth maps on my ipad which showed the channel very clearly! Another favourite place was the old harbour of Bono with its suspension bridge, where we stayed on the trots, and had a lovely walk through the woods to an old boat graveyard.

It was often quite difficult to find places to anchor away from the wash of boats but above the top of the moorings was often good. We also visited Auray which is an historic, interesting town.

1st Aug. Up at 03.00 and we retraced our track out of the Morbihan with half a moon and clear sky. We were sailing into the sun as it came up but it was a lovely morning and we tacked as had time to get to the lock into the Vilaine river. There is a viewing platform for people to watch the boats in the lock! We were



through at midday and the endless planning and looking at tidal arrows was over, we were in sheltered



water and now took a few leisurely days to sail up to our final destination of Redon, from where Bryn would take over the boat and trail it home.

The Vilaine was a beautiful peaceful river with nice places to visit like Roche Bernard. When we reached Redon we totted up the miles and places visited and



found in the 11 weeks on the boat, we had done 1069 nautical miles and made 71 stops. We only paid for 31 nights, and largely managed to avoid marinas in the second part of the trip. There is always more motoring than one would like but the necessity to catch the tide was so often the overriding factor. We had no major mishaps and were still good friends, all quite an achievement on which to reflect!

The Route

