

***Eb & Vloed* sailing trip from Kortgene to Almere**

Henk Dessens.
Eb & Vloed (726).

Estuaries and rivers

At the end of the afternoon the wind of that day had totally abated. A bigger contrast with the days before was hardly possible. Three days we had been waiting in Kortgene. A strong wind, Bft. 7 and heavy squalls, had confined us to the Delta Marina and made it impossible to cross the Oosterschelde. The weather forecast predicted a row of depressions in the next week, with at least one advantage: a south western wind, the best we could have to sail back to our home port Almere, about 30 km northwest of Amsterdam.

On Monday morning a SW 3 and the ebb brought us gently over the Oosterschelde to the entrance of the Keeten. From that moment not only the tide, but also the bearing wind had become less favourable. By sailing close to the shore we tried to evade the strong current as much as possible. Happily the wind backed a little, so we could use the sails until the Krammer-lock. In the Zijpe the counter-current was so strong that we had to call on the Honda and its 6 hp for a minute or so.



Photo 1. Sluice of Oude Tonge

When approaching the village of Oude Tonge at 15.30h, the wind collapsed completely. Dick and Marjo, in *Bruintje*, motor sailed further on to Willemstad. We considered anchoring outside the sluice of Oude Tonge. But the weather-forecast ('gusts with thunderstorms') were motivating enough for passing the sluice and looking for a quiet mooring between the meadows behind the dike. Until quite

recently this area still was an open estuary, with a tidal difference up to 5 metres. The sluice in the dike was closed when the sea became too intrusive.

In fact 'harbour' is a big word for this narrow dead-end canal that ends in a quay. Old maps of this area prove that the island Overflakkee is a patch-work of small reclaimed former shoals, formed to deposit during ages by the eternal tides. In the nineteenth century and before, my ancestors on mother's side, who were fishermen from Middelharnis, lived on this island. When the local fisheries with traditional 'long-line sloops' perished, my grandfather took service on tramps and trawlers, and later moved to a small town between Rotterdam and Hook of Holland.

This is 'God created the world, but the Dutch created the Netherlands'-area. In the past, after every new embankment of the shoals, the narrow canal between the village and the sea had to be lengthened, to allow sailing barges enter the port. So during a thousand years this landscape, which is unique for the south western delta, was gradually moulded. However, in the last 15 years Oude Tonge probably underwent a heavier attack of change than in the millennium before. At port side of the canal the old warehouses have been demolished and replaced by a quarter of fancy villas, built on artificial isles. In the centre of the village a big supermarket with a subterranean parking garage thoroughly wiped away any remnant of what once was a unique local outlook. To make it even worse, the area outside the sluice has been transformed in bureaucratic 'nature'. The original creek, meandering through the former tidal shoals in front of the sluice has been dredged away completely and replaced by a straight canal. Thousands of cubic metres of sand and mud were moved, new dams of basalt have been built to form artificial ponds, protected by new signs with the text 'Nature reserve-Entrance forbidden'!



Photo 2. Mooring in the canal to Oude Tonge.

On Tuesday, at the end of the morning, the Volkerak-locks are already behind us and with an increasing wind (NW 5-6) on the Hollands Diep *Eb & Vloed* asks for a second reef in the mainsail. A 3.500-tons motor tanker, leaving the locks, initially behaves strange and keeps me watchful, and indeed, at a distance of less than 50 meters, it suddenly changes its course to portside in the direction of the Haringvliet, without any warning. In the wheelhouse I see a whole bunch of people, who seems

busier with their drinks and nibbles than with maritime affairs. Close hauling to the wind immediately prevents *Eb & Vloed* perishing by other liquids than fresh water. A few minutes later, in front of Willemstad we suddenly see Dick and Marjo in *Bruintje* again, leaving the harbour, and also reefing their mainsail. We turn up into the wind and make a tack to approach them and sail on together.



Photo 3. Dick and Marjo in *Bruintje* on the Hollands Diep.

This is the start of an intense sailing-trip, with huge waves from astern. Having passed the bridges of Moerdijk, we cross the river to portside to enter the Lower-Merwede. The wind is still blowing, from portside now, and is pushing our boat firmly upriver. At starboard is the Biesbosch, wetlands that were formed after the Saint Elisabeth-flood of 1421. In a few hours we will approach the old town of Gorinchem, situated on the right side of the Upper-Merwede, a branch of the Rhine.



Photo 4. Sailing upstream on the Lower- Merwede.

The Lower-Merwede was created in the nineteenth century and later evolved into one of the most beautiful ‘riverscapes’ of the Netherlands. The Saint Elisabeth-flood had changed this area into an inland sea, but ebb and flow created new shoals which were embanked, and consequently transformed by the inhabitants into low willow-grounds and later meadows and fields, intersected with many narrow creeks and rivers, the Lower-Merwede being one of them. The river-bed is fringed by white beaches, river-dunes and groynes of basalt. If you are ever considering to spend a holiday in the Netherlands with a Shrimper, this is one of the recommended and typical –Dutch areas. ‘Bies’ means bulrush, ‘bos’ is wood or forest. You can combine sailing and exploring this former tidal area with visiting very old and monumental towns as Dordrecht, Woudrichem and Heusden.



Photo 6. *Bruintje* passing a basalt groyne (with green beacon) on the Lower-Merwede. On the background: the Biesbosch-wetlands.

To enter Gorinchem and its lock, we have to cross the Upper-Merwede, which is serious business in view of the very big and fast motor-barges that sail up to Germany and down to Antwerp or Europort. It is recommended to cross the river with a small boat only with a 90° course, and be aware of the high speed of ships that sail downstream, with speeds up to 25 km/h when they have no cargo in. Motoring and sailing we cross the river safely and pass the lock towards 17.00h. We have friends living here on the waterside in the old centre of the town, a good opportunity to see them again. *Bruintje* continues to Vreeswijk, their trip for this week is much longer than ours, their destination for next weekend is Friesland. We both have to lower our masts, to enter the first part of the idyllic Merwede-canal, dug in the 1820's to make a better link between Amsterdam and the Rhine. We say goodbye to Dick and Marjo. They sail to the left, and we choose for the opposite to spend the night at the mooring of our friends Dieke and Christine.



Photo 7. 19th century lock, the entrance of the river Linge and Merwede-canal at Arkel.

Canals

The Royal 'Met' of the Netherlands seems to have procured a subscription on Low Pressure Areas the rest of this week (and also for the month of July, as we later learned) and every day of the week brings a lot of wind and showers. In fact we feel some relief that we let the 'big work' behind us now.

Motoring on the canals, through Vianen, Vreeswijk and the old centre of Utrecht and on the small river Vecht with its 17th and 18th century country seats, do not ask for much courage and seamanship.

The most exciting moment is crossing the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal between Jutphaas and Utrecht, a first rate canal where motorbarges sail at speeds which do not suppose that fuel is scarce and expensive these days.

Sailing through the centre of Utrecht (the Oude Gracht) is spectacular. We have done this before, but could imagine that a foreigner would like to sail this canal between the medieval houses twice or even more on one day. We pass the Weerdsuis-lock north of Utrecht together with some motorboats. At some distance of the centre a nautical mile of house-boats in the canal is the red light district of the town, with many cars driving up and down the street. A hired motorboat with a French couple on board is sailing in front of us, and it is funny to see their reaction as they are slowly being aware of what is going on here.



Photo 8. The Oude Gracht (Old Canal) in Utrecht.

This night we stay in Maarssen, the hometown of my younger sister and her husband. It is difficult to say what we enjoy most now: their warm shower or the meal!

Thursday starts with hoisting the mast and then we sail on the Vecht to the north, but showers in the afternoon bring us to the decision to stop around 14.00h. We find a lovely mooring on portside near Overmeer, and during a walk we find a farmhouse where the farmer's wife makes and sells here home made cheese. A low dike with poplars and willows give us some lee, this is a good place to wait for .. a better day? – in terms of temperature and sun. Later in the afternoon Cornish Crabber *Lowietje* will join us on this mooring.



Photo 9. 13th century castle at the mouth of the Vecht in Muiden.

Friday brings a lot of wind again, and unfortunately also showers. In Muiden, opposite of the old castle at the mouth of the Vecht, we enter the Royal Netherlands' Rowing and Sailing Club for a moment to say hello to Yolanda, who works at the administration office and we enjoy a delicious cup of cappuccino on the terrace – the rain is behaving very well for this moment. In Muiden we set sail to the last of three small islands about 1 mile of the coast of the Ysselmeer. To summarize this end of the week: (too) cold and (too) wet. On Saturday we continue with a good wind from astern, but in a pouring rain. After noon we moor *Eb & Vloed* alongside our sailing barge *Heiltje* (b. 1895). We look back to a very inspiring Shrimper-week in Zeeland – and challenging trip back to our hometown!