

# Our Shrimper Holiday in the South of France

## Bormes Les Mimosas and the Hyères Islands

1-14 September 2018

### Participants:

Jon and Marie-Do, Shrimper 19 'Merriwinds' 847

Ian and Helen, Shrimper 19 'Black Sheep' 435

Harry and Helene, Shrimper 19 'Moby Dick' 288

Tim and Ruth, Shrimper 21 'Sapphire' 17

Ian and Sara, Shrimper 21 'Money Penny' 007

**Saturday September 1<sup>st</sup>** - Having crossed the channel by ferry or Shuttle the four British crews set out on the first leg of the journey south. Some got away sooner than others, but by mid-morning our 'WhatsApp' network confirmed that, with free-flowing motorway traffic, we were all making good progress south. Jon and Marie-Do crossed Lyon by late afternoon and turned off the motorway at Tain l'Hermitage heading for the planned large camping municipal only to find it fully booked! There were plenty of others, and after some searching the camping 'Les Acacias' a couple of miles up the road proved to be a good overnight stop. The address was sent out, and the others said they were on their way. With real pleasure (and some relief), as the evening progressed, each new arrival was greeted, Ian and Helen being the last at about 10pm. After months of planning, our holiday was happening! Excited, we had a cheerful meal together. During the evening a message came in from Harry and Helene saying that they were on course for their planned early start from Holland the next morning.



**Sunday September 2<sup>nd</sup>** - No-one seemed in too much of a hurry to get away, but over the course of a sunny and increasingly warm morning the crews eventually departed for the final drive of 215 miles to Bormes. This took a little longer than expected due to a leisurely stop for lunch in many cases. An exciting moment was when, from the motorway near La Ciotat, we caught our first glimpse of the Mediterranean -and beautiful it looked too! Jon and Marie-Do lead the way and arrived at our planned destination camping 'Beauséjour' at about 3pm. Over the next couple of hours, the others arrived. That evening, with the temperature now pleasantly warm, we explored the surrounding area including Le Lavandou, and visited Bormes marina who offered us some berths on a pontoon together. It was agreed to stay in Bormes and we visited the local big supermarket for supplies before returning to the campsite for a barbeque. Harry and Helene messaged that they were well on their way.



**Monday September 3<sup>rd</sup>** - The 21s left for their pre-booked craning-in, and the 19s went to the slipway. Black Sheep and Merriwinds were put into the water, although the slipway was surprisingly quite busy. Trailers were left next to the car park. We were given places together on a pontoon with easy access to the town. It was great to see Harry and Helene arrive mid-afternoon after an epic journey. Without delay 'Moby Dick' was soon in the water and on the pontoon with the rest of us. At 6pm we had a rendezvous with a local, M Martin who had offered us trailer parking in the field behind his house. Some of us then visited Jon and Marie-Do's friends Daniel and Colette and had a very pleasant aperitif by their pool. Later we all walked into town and had 'Couscous' in a restaurant. It was then on to our first night on board which, although situated near the entrance to the marina, proved very peaceful. French boats don't seem to go out much in the evening, the wind drops off, and there is no noticeable tidal movement.



**Tuesday September 4<sup>th</sup>** - A sparkling, sunny morning full of promise (but as it turned out, so were all the others!). The flotilla was away by 11am for a local shakedown cruise with a beat into a southerly wind down the coast and around Cap Bénat to anchor for lunch and a swim in a cove beneath a headland with Charles Aznavour's villa above us. Ashore is a securely guarded private estate, but some access to the beach is permitted. An easy sail back during the afternoon. That evening we ate aboard.

**Wednesday September 5<sup>th</sup>** - A longer trip: again, about force 3 but a bit more easterly, so around Cap Bénat and down to the 'Plage de la Reine Jeanne' where, with a lot of other boats we anchored for lunch and a swim in the small bay just outside the tiny harbour belonging to the estate which is the holiday home of the Duke of Luxembourg. The easterly made it a bit choppy so we later sailed a little further west keeping outside the buoys around the impressive 'Fort de Brégançon' which is the official holiday residence of the president of France. On to what the local guides describe as one of France's best beaches, the 'Plage de l'Estagnol'. Our shallow drafts allowed us to push right up against the limiting buoys off the beautiful beach. Here we were able to swim ashore for a coffee or spend a long time in the warm water. It was even possible to swim down to examine keels underwater. On returning to Bormes we went shopping.



**Thursday September 6<sup>th</sup>** - By bike or on foot we all went to Le Lavandou and explored the large market before sitting outside a harbourside café for a pleasant leisurely lunch. On return some of us explored La Favière, the area around Bormes port. Tim and Ruth decided to follow the local glass bottomed tourist boats from Le Lavandou and explore a reef along the coast. They came back full of their experiences of swimming amongst the fish. That evening we ate aboard.

**Friday September 7<sup>th</sup>** - The detailed port weather forecast was predicting force 5 gusting 6, so we decided to have another day ashore to explore the area between le Lavandou and Hyères. In bright sunshine under blue skies we drove along the beautiful coast road through vineyards (which some returned to later to taste and buy wine) to the marina at Port Miramar which is smaller and didn't seem worth moving to. With some surprise we noticed plenty of small boats were out in spite of the forecast. On to Hyeres and its two large marinas which appeared a bit industrial in comparison with Bormes. During our lunch at a harbourside restaurant Tim ordered chicken gizzards and assured us they were delicious. The wind meanwhile gusted a couple of times to about force 5 before quickly abating to a balmy force 2.



On to old Hyères town and its delightful medieval streets leading to a steep climb up to the historic Art Deco Villa Noailles, once home of a daring set of hedonistic 1920s millionaires. It was now feeling very hot and we went to an air-conditioned hypermarket and shopping complex nearby. Home for a barbecue on our new electric grill as we had discovered the €15 marina fee included electricity!

**Saturday September 8<sup>th</sup>** - The forecast being good for several days to come, we decided to sail as a flotilla the 10 miles across to the unspoilt national park island of Port Cros. With a temperature in the high twenties, a beam easterly force 3-4, clear blue skies and a gentle deep azure sea this proved to be an amazing sail -as Tim described it, 'champagne sailing'. Arrival in the small charming natural harbour nestled in forest clad hills, with its palm trees and beachside bars was the stuff of sailors' dreams. We tied up, as always, stern-to, and went ashore to explore this magical place. That afternoon a group of us walked along rough forest paths to reach a beach where you can follow an underwater trail amid teeming, completely tame fishes. Amazing! That evening the island had a party atmosphere with busy bars, music and a large wedding party, but, tired out, we were glad to go to bed. Alas the night was not as quiet as expected, as one by one the 'gin palaces' (whose underwater lights on the pontoon had charmed us by attracting hundreds of fish the previous evening) started their enormous engines, let them idle for 20 minutes and then, accompanied by drunken laughter, finally bumped their way out against other boats before accelerating into the night.





**Sunday September 9<sup>th</sup>** - We awoke to the smell of coffee and the sound of children fishing from the pontoon. Over breakfast we decided to carry on to the next island, Porquerolles. The plan was to go to the south of the island and Tim and Ruth headed off and seemed to make good progress. Leaving Port Cros the wind dropped back to force 1-2 and it looked like a long passage ahead. Was there some current past the islands? We seemed to make very slow headway. Eventually we used the motor and cut across north to a bay just outside the harbour where we anchored. The setting was idyllic.



A couple of hours later Tim and Ruth reappeared from their mooring around the coast and we all entered the crowded harbour. They found us five places on the same pontoon, and, safely moored up, we went ashore to explore. Porquerolles is larger than Port Cros, with a few shops and hotels and even a couple of cars, but it still retains a 'South Pacific' atmosphere and outside the village there are no paved roads. We walked around in head-shaking delight, before a 'quick drink' in a harbourside bar lengthened into a convivial couple of hours. At the end of the day we felt sorry for the hundreds of day trippers queuing up for the ferry back, -we had the privilege of staying in this amazing place!

**Monday September 10th** - There was so much to do and see on this magical island that we were spoiled for choice. Some had a luxurious late breakfast on the terrace of a hotel, some explored on foot while others went on a cycle ride and had lunch in a 'Robinson Crusoe' style beach-side restaurant. The locals were friendly and interested in our little flotilla. We were told that there was a French-owned Shrimper in the harbour but I'm not sure if anyone actually saw it. The day ended with a jolly communal omelette on the pontoon.

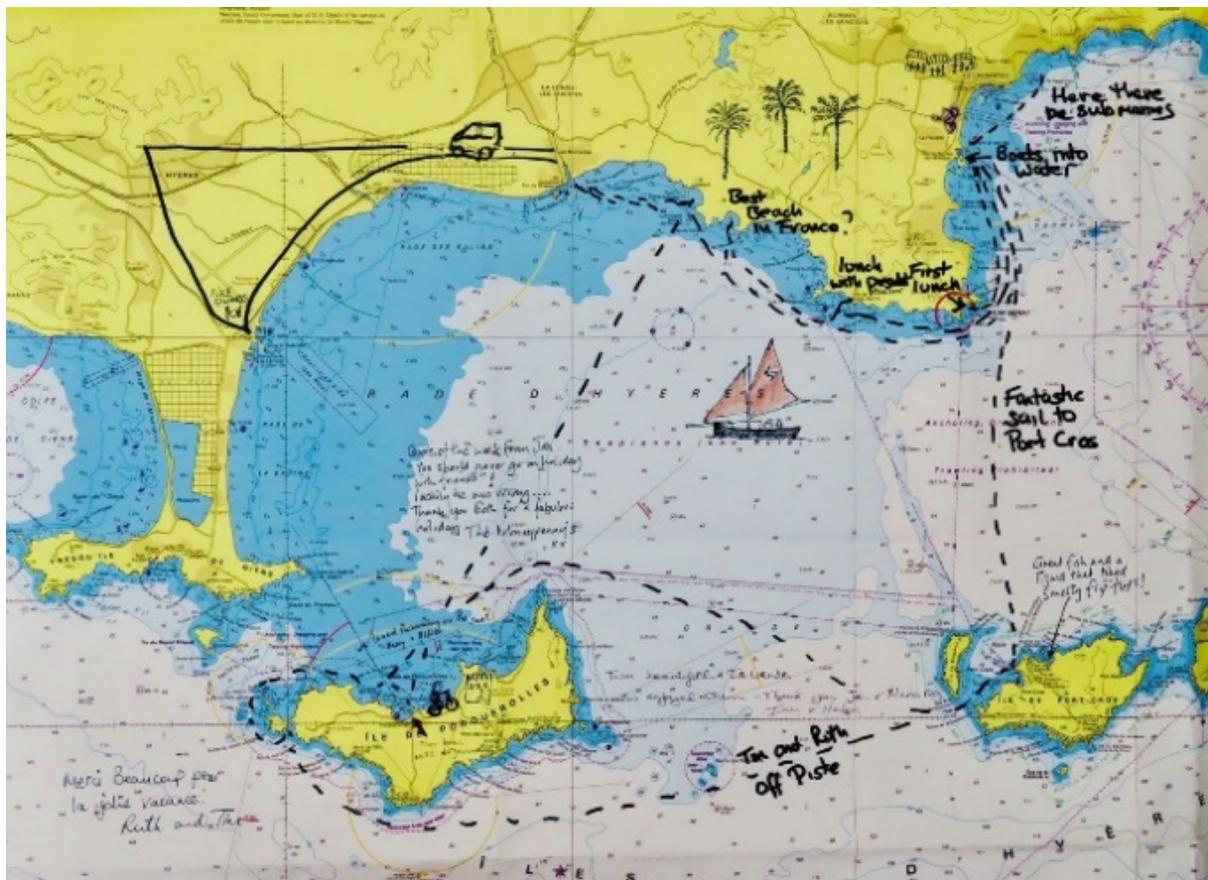


**Tuesday September 11<sup>th</sup>** - The morning arrived hot, bright and windless. No-one was in any hurry to leave, but we eventually agreed to cross back to the mainland. Ian and Helen wanted to return for another night in Bormes, but the rest of us sailed across a flat calm sea to the 'Plage de Pellegrin' directly North. This is a beautiful unspoilt cove with vineyards beyond the sand, busy in the summer but now deserted with several unused mooring buoys just off the beach. After a relaxed afternoon. Jon and Marie-Do and Harry and Helene decide to overnight in Port Miramar (about 3 miles away) where they arrived just as the harbourmaster was leaving. He couldn't be bothered to do any paperwork and just said to moor anywhere. Looking for adventure, Tim and Ruth, Ian and Sarah decided to stay and overnight 'al fresco'. Apparently, the evening was amazing even if a few mosquitoes did call by.



**Wednesday September 12<sup>th</sup>** - After a night in the Port Miramar marina we woke early. Helene was disappointed that there seemed nowhere open to buy a coffee, so we quietly left without waiting for any officials to arrive and ask for a fee, and returned for breakfast with the others in the little bay. We later sailed back along the coast, past the president's castle and around Cap Bénat to Bormes, and were allocated new places in the marina. We then fetched our trailers ready for taking the boats out in the morning. A convivial dinner ensued in a harbourside restaurant. Ian and Helen meanwhile took their boat out and left late that evening as they were heading back to visit Paris and Versailles on their journey home.

**Thursday September 13<sup>th</sup>** - The remaining boats came out of the water and then we went on to our campsite about 2km away. We had one final treat in store: a visit to the ancient hillside village of Old Bormes. That very warm evening, exploring the narrow streets full of interesting little shops was a delight. We returned for a final barbeque in the campsite. Tim and Ruth then stayed in the Casino car park so that they could leave very early the next morning.



**Friday September 14<sup>th</sup>** - Harry and Helene left early. As the weather was still set fair, Ian and Sarah decided to stay another day and went off to explore the vineyards, while Jon and Marie-Do simply relaxed and enjoyed the sunshine. Sadly, our Shrimper holiday was over, but it had been wonderful. A group of like-minded people who got on well together and were all happy to join in. How fortunate we were to experience together some amazing sailing in the best possible circumstances. And, as keen Shrimper owners able to tow our boats to new cruising grounds...what do we do next?