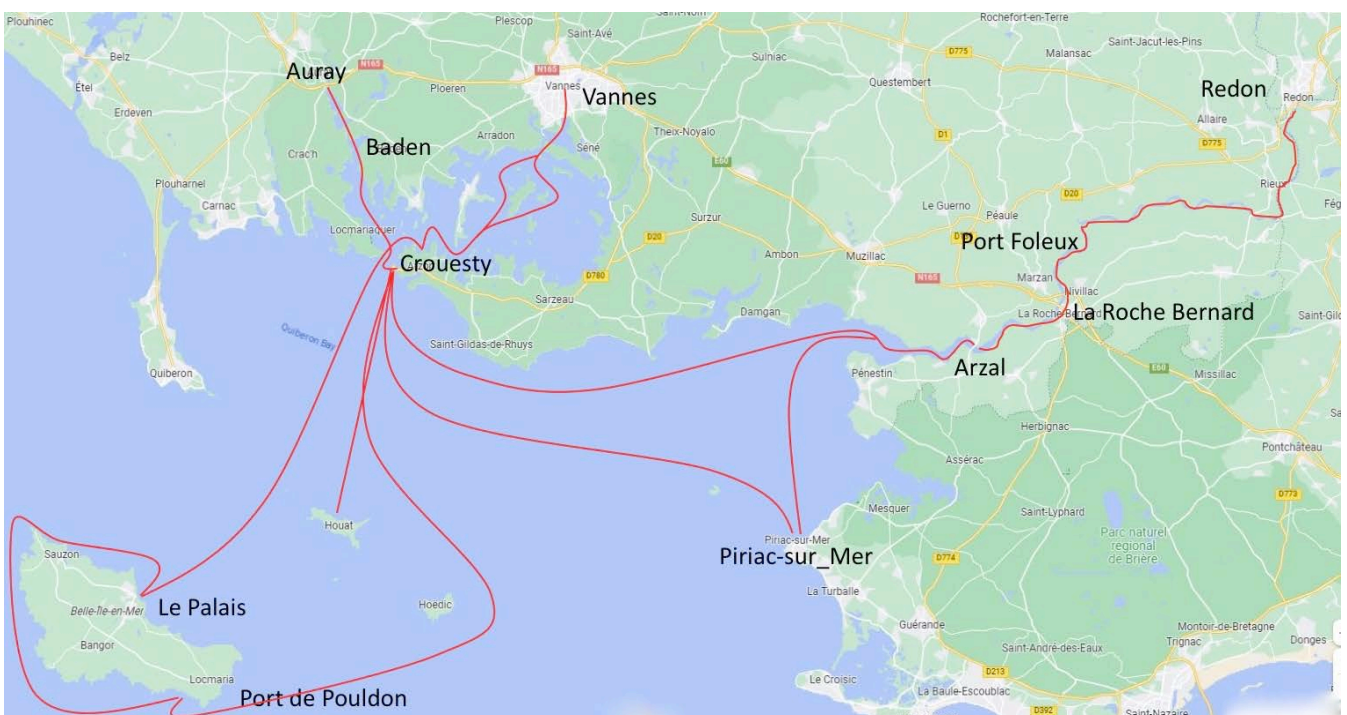


Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove

After a poor summer of sailing *Dilly* (21/102) out of her home at Dittisham on the River Dart it was great to remember that we had booked a ferry from Plymouth to Roscoff at the end of August. The Golfe du Morbihan is known to many Shrimper owners, so our early research was helped by logs on the SOA website. Jean-Claude Devaux of the French Association of Cornish Crabbers Owners very kindly responded to an e-mail asking where he might suggest for launching. His recommendation of a yard called Le Borgne near Baden proved to be just right. After putting off phoning and using my poor French to try and arrange a lift-in for *Dilly*, I bit the bullet and was delighted to find out that the lady at the yard had lived in the USA for a few years and spoke perfect English. First hurdle crossed. The second hurdle was to find out the rules and regulations about taking a boat on a trailer to the EU. These are not complicated but I found it difficult to get definitive rules about what is required. This was not surprising as they don't really exist; taking a boat over the border into the EU constitutes a Temporary Admission. However there is also a form to be filled out which I only discovered on arrival at Roscoff. The Douane there were flexible though and waved us through with no form filling required. The third hurdle was to get on the ferry with dangerous goods aboard *Dilly*; it had never occurred to me that those little CO2 canisters that blow up lifejackets when the toggle is pulled can be used to kill people and are therefore considered to be dangerous goods! The result was that we were first in the queue at the check-in and last to get on the ferry so that the dangerous goods were at the aft end.

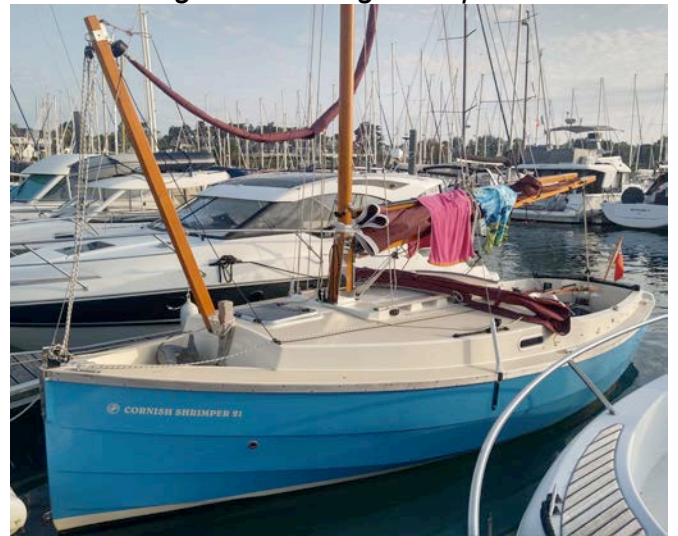


Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove

On the 23rd August we arrived in France, had an easy drive to the yard and launched the boat in a hurry as the tide was falling fast. We were then able to relax and settle into three weeks of sailing bliss. Our first stop was Auray at the sailing head of the river. We were worried about where we could moor but simply went alongside the town quay outside a café where we had our first café longue.



Alongside at Auray, Crouesty Marina and The Magic of a Rising Bowsprit



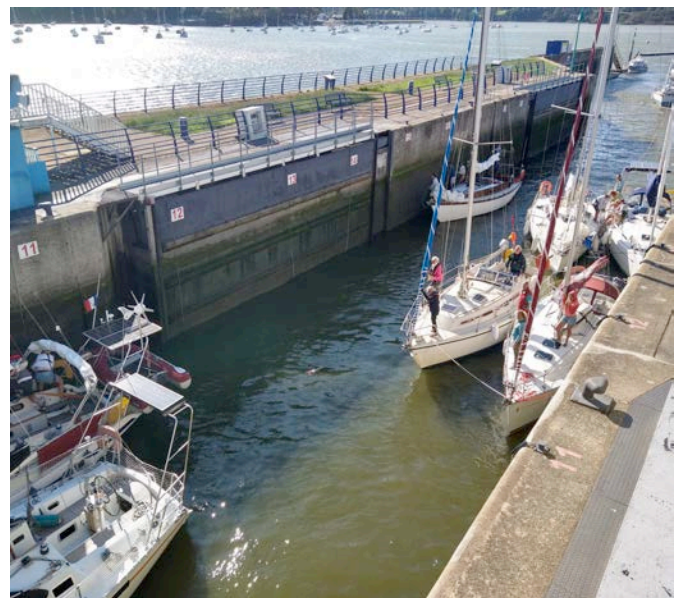
That evening we popped out of the Golfe and turned to the east to stay overnight in the huge Port Crouesty. We tried our best to communicate with the Capitainerie before entering but realised that the best method of finding a berth was to turn up! Having a sweet little Cornish Shrimper has its advantages in Brittany as the local people like traditional craft. At Crouesty and the other marinas we were met at the entrance by young people in dinghies who had the list of berths available that night and they would invariably find a nice little slot for our vessel of 6.4 metres (with the bowsprit raised). The big plastic white yachts had to make do with the crowded visitors' areas.

Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove

It was at the 1,200 berth Crouesty that we picked up our **Plaisance Morbihan** card. This enables you to book in easily at the Capitainerie at each marina and gives you points for each night. I didn't really believe it would work but it did; our last night was free. The card and the app, that is linked to your card, also lets you gain entry to the showers by waving the card or your phone at the electronic gizmo by the door. The cost of marinas in Brittany was remarkable. The first night, on the 24th August, cost us €19; the shocking thing was that after the 1st September the cost dropped to €12! No longer could I use cost of marinas as an excuse to anchor for the night.

Our plan for the cruise was to visit areas outside the Golfe for the first fortnight and then be inside the Morbihan for the final week so if the weather turned against us we would be near our trailer for the journey home. So on the 25th we set off for Arzal on the Vilaine river. We had a lovely sail with a following Force 5 and then met the melee outside the Barrage d'Arzal.

There is a website with all the information you need to go through this large exciting lock although we didn't find it until later. Viewing the *Passport Ecluse* site is well worth it because it not only tells you when the lock is operating but you can also register your intention to enter it at your chosen time. The lock is governed by tides and water level on the Vilaine so opening times are not regular.



Waiting for the lock at Arzal & The lock from the viewing area

When we arrived at the lock we didn't know when it would open but the vessels milling about by the entrance looked like a maritime version of a French ski queue so we presumed that it would be soon. Then the gate opened and the rush started. Being English in a small boat we hung back as the rest made for the

Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove

lock. It is large. I am told that it can take up to 30 yachts and there must have been that many in front of us in the queue but we managed to push in and tie up alongside a lovely Guernsey yacht for the passage through. It takes about half an hour for the whole process after which you get out on to the Vilaine, which is a large fresh water reservoir masquerading as a river. It is lovely.

On the 26th we sailed up river (that has little current if any) to stop at Roche Bernard for lunch and a look around before going on to Port Foleux. We tried again to make contact over the VHF before arriving but couldn't understand the lady giving us instructions. A passing English speaking Frenchman helpfully told us that all we had to do was look for the man in the "little red boat". This we did and he found us a berth between a Swiss yacht that had been across the Atlantic a couple of times and a British 36 footer.



The Vilaine River

Here we discovered that the French reaction to the British after Brexit seems to be much more relaxed than we had thought. The British boat was permanently moored in the Vilaine and because it was there before 2016 the owners were granted residency status so they can come and go back to the UK as they wish. We started to formulate a plan to make use of the 18 month rule to leave our Shrimper there for some time after taking it to Holland for ISW 2024.

The 27th was a day of cycling on our Bromptons, which fit very well in the pilot berths under the cockpit, and then on the 28th we sailed further up river to Redon before coming back down a little to a deserted pontoon at Rieux. Then a tacking day to return to Port Foleux which was beginning to close down as the end of the French season approached. The 30th was a cycle in the morning and

Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove

then sail back down to Roche Bernard for an evening ashore before an early start to make the 08:00 hours opening of the Barrage d'Arzal. Some rain was forecast for the 1st September so we decided to sail across the bay to Piriac sur Mer. A walk along the shore was full on interest on the 2nd. First of all we were entranced by the huge number of people with nets getting their supper from the rocks along the tide line. We thought they were looking for the moules but we discovered that they were also filling their buckets with small shrimps. Then we sat down and noticed some activity by a mooring and realised that the boat that was moored there was no longer on top of the water but underneath it. A recovery operation created interest for many on the shore.

As we had promised a friend from my working days, who had moved to Brittany, a sail we returned to Crouesty to pick him up on the 3rd September. We all had a cracking day sail out to Houat. The sun shone, the wind was a lovely Force 3 on the beam, and the lunch stop was off a delightful sandy beach. The wine went well with the bread and cheese and the day was finished by being taken to a creperie by a local resident who got a good table and knew exactly what to order. One to remember.



Beach anchorage off Houat

Variety is required on any holiday so on the 4th we set off for Belle Ile en Mer to get away from marinas and people. The sailing was good but the wind from the east was rising as we approached the island so we went around the south west corner and anchored in a bay known as Port de Pouldon. It is not a port! Just a protected bay where we dropped our 6kg Knox and went ashore in our

Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove

canoe to take a walk and find a signal to let the mother-in-law know that we were still alive. It was a lovely little place which we shared with two other yachts that looked like live-aboards. A safe anchorage or so I thought but at 02:00 hours I was not so sure as the swell coming into the bay had risen, the tide had dropped, and there was definitely a nasty looking rock not far off our port quarter! Time to up anchor and move so we could sleep a little easier.



The anchorage on the south coast of Belle Ile

The swell coming in off the Atlantic was something that I haven't really noticed on the south coast of England. The wind was nowhere to be seen on the 5th as we drifted and motored west and north around the island but the swell was a good 2 metres so motor boats came and went in our vision. Once around the northern tip of the island we were protected so could stop for lunch in a bay before trying to get into Le Palais. This is another place that is locked and only open about 2 hours either side of HW. Again there is a rush when the lock opens but we were well prepared this time and being small and good looking found our way in and up through the big boats moored three abreast off the quay into an area with pontoons. Belle Ile is expensive though; twice the price of mainland marinas. We noticed that they even charge for parking cars which we had not seen anywhere on the mainland. The café for supper was good though, another huge plate of moules and frites.

Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove

The tourist brochures suggest that there are 50 kms of bike paths on the island. They could be correct but they don't mention that you share them with cars; they are lanes! Nevertheless we had a lovely day of cycling and swimming before returning to the same café for supper. The time had come to return to the Golfe so we sailed through the entrance on the evening of the 7th September and anchored out of the tidal stream in a bay a few miles to the east of the entrance.



Le Palais on Belle Ile & Typical oyster beds



We knew that we had to be careful with the tides but had not been able to find a reasonable tidal atlas of the Golfe and were beginning to understand why on that first night at anchor. There are so many islands and bays that the speed and directions of the stream vary quickly and dramatically. We were tucked into a peaceful little bay but less than 50m away the stream looked a good 5 knots. The other thing we learnt was the importance of finding out where the oyster beds and

Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove

their accompanying stakes were located. These aren't shown accurately on the Navionics charts or the local paper chart that we were loaned, but they are shown on the French equivalent of the OS maps. The stakes are dangerous, especially to Shrimpers that like to get into shoal waters to get out of the tidal stream as they are often metal and just below the surface at HW.

You can sail from one end of the Golfe to the other in a day; we did so on the 8th by sailing from the entrance to Vannes. This is another port that you lock into but by this time we were experienced navigateurs of French shores so it didn't worry us one little bit. We were met as always by a helpful man in a rubber dinghy who shouted out a berth number for us. Vannes is a delightful place. The staff in the Capitainerie were very helpful and lent us some real bikes with big wheels to go off to Decathlon to acquire a solar shower. The old town is very picturesque and we had a lovely supper sat next to a couple from the other side of France and were consequently further from their home than we were from ours.



Learning to row in Vannes

After our night in Vannes with dinner ashore it was time for a few nights anchored off islands of the Golfe. There is plenty of room for everyone in September, it would seem that the 1,200 vessels in Crouesty are either tucked up in their berths or off and out to sea. The first night we had one other boat about 150 metres away. The next morning we went exploring the unoccupied island and discovered the drawback of being ashore, mosquitos – lots. The following day, after a sail to nowhere in particular, we anchored on the lee of the Ile-d'Arz which is the second largest island in the Golfe. A walk around half of the island the next morning showed that it is probably very full of visitors until the end of August but the only things open when we were there on the 10th September were one café and the church where the permanent island habitants were attending a funeral.

Sailing from the Golfe du Morbihan by Paul Musgrove



An island anchorage in the Golfe

Our final sailing day back towards the yard at Baden was delightful despite the lack of a decent amount of wind. The sun shone, we could go for a swim in the warm water when the wind dropped entirely, and we saw another Shrimper. We were thwarted by the tidal stream at one point so had to anchor until it dropped sufficiently to get through that tidal gate. Then we had a typical Golfe problem. As the tides can go up both sides of an island, if you are trying to get around it there comes a point where you were with the tide then suddenly you are against it. Without local knowledge or a tide table there is no knowing when the tide will change at a specific point so lady luck plays a large part of sailing around the Golfe. - The next day we lifted out and went on our way back to Somerset.



Paul and Annie Musgrove Dilly (21/102)