

A cold weekend in April 2010

In september 2009 we sailed *E b& Vloed* from our hometown Almere to the Waddensea-area in the north of the Netherlands. Weekend-trips in autumn '09 and the second weekend of April '10 brought us to the isles of Schiermonnikoog and Ameland. After a winter with much snow and ice, *Eb & Vloed* was launched again in the marina in Zoutkamp in the second week of April. One day later, Patricia and I defied the arctic temperatures in our survival suits and found ourself nearly alone (only one other boat, a trimaran) in the marina of Schiermonnikoog. Happily we met some friends who are living on the island and spent the evening in the warm bar-roof of the old and renowned Hotel Van der Werf. The walls of the dining-room are covered with paintings, charts, shipmodels and other maritime heritage. But one week later Patricia and our daughter who lives in Amsterdam had decided to spend a mother-and-daughter weekend in town- but the wheaterforecast gave dry wheater and sun, so early in the morning of Friday 18 April I drove to Zoutkamp again to be both *Eb & Vloed's* skipper and mate for this weekend. At 10.00 a.m. I stepped on board and made a plan for the next days. I can't help that I enjoy sailing trips at most with some idea of having a destination. The N-wind (5) and permanent failure of my Raymarine handheld VHF (only 3 years old!) brought me to the decision not to go to the Waddensea but to stay in the sheltered Lauwersmeer-area, and see if I could meet an old colleague who moved to this area (were he had grown up in his childhood) after his retirement a few years ago. So today *Eb & Vloed* is bound for Oudwoude (Old-Wood), along the meandering Oude Dokkumer Diep (Old Dokkum Channel), a dead arm of what once was a tidal creek. Today's northern wind is perfect for this trip, especially as the forecast for tomorrow is a SW wind. Double-reefed we leave Zoutkamp at 11.00 a.m., heading for the mouth of the channel that leads to the locks of Dokkumer Nieuwezijlen (Dokkum's New Sluices). It is easy to recognise the fysical origins of this wide and green area: before 1200 AD these lands were still wadden-area, with farmers and fishermen living on artificial hills, which were called 'terp' in Friesland and 'wierde' in Groningen. The floods of the sea left masses of clay and sand at the banks of the creeks and channels and built up the low hills in a natural way that can be seen everywhere around here. The Roman historian Plinius described these first inhabitants as 'like castaways, living on low hills that they had made themselves in an area that was inundated two times a day by the tides'. Due to these prehistoric processes of nature and due to the industrious early Frisians and Groningers (and monks) who built dikes and dug canals, we still can enjoy cruising through a landscape which is unique in Europe.

It asks for some precaution to pass the lock at Dokkumer Nieuwe Zijlen safely, so I lower the sails and start the Honda. The bridge is open now and *Eb & Vloed* sails into the lock. The doors of the lock close behind me and we rise about one meter to the standard waterlevel of the province of Friesland. A ten minutes later I can hoist both sails again and we go to port, in the direction of Kollum, and after a few kilometers to starboard, into the meandering Oude Dokkumer Diep. In this landscape it is the wind that rules, hardly any sound of motorways can be heard, and what we hear are only the bells of the 800 years old small church of Engwierum and 'peeps' and 'skreeks' of birds. Falcons and harriers are looking for a prey, barn-owls are making their nests in the attics of the reed-covered farmhouses.

Unfortunately my old colleague Lieuwe is not at home this weekend. We both worked in the 1980's in the Maritime Museum of Rotterdam, until I changed job and went to the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. But this spot is too beautiful not to enjoy a night staying here – in the middle of silence. Only one thing is a little bit alarming: the wheater forecast speaks about night-frost. It is surprising how messages like these can contribute to a lesser degree of civilisation: the only clothes I dispose of are my fleece jack and woolen cap and in this ill-mannerred state I slip into my sleeping bag – at 9.00 P.M.! Early in the morning *Eb &*

Vloed is completely covered with a layer of ice – but happily the sun is shining and the ice has melted away before 9.00 a.m. And to make my day complete: the wind has shifted to SW! So after a breakfast of tea, bacon, eggs and saucages, after having washed up and sticking a note for my friend on his door, I hoist sails again, bound for Zoutkamp again.

This is really an ideal cruising area for a boat with a centreboard like a Shrimper. The Waddensea is very nearby and if the winds are too strong, the Lauwersmeer-area and adjacent shallow creeks, channels are a good alternative. The sloping fields which once were shoals and sands, and the very old small hamlets with their characteristic small churches are the tangible heritage of a long history.

Henk Dessens

Eb & Vloed no. 726.



Marina 'Hunzegat' in Zoutkamp.



Eb & Vloed sails on the Oude Dokkumer Diep



Meandering waters, reed-covered farmhouses and sailing barges.



Dokkumer Nieuwe Zijlen