

"BLACK DOG" TRIP TO THE ISLES OF SCILLIES 1998

I bought "Black Dog" from Ken Robertson in 1995 and after spending two years sailing up and down the Camel Estuary thought it was about time to venture further. There are not many places to go on the North Cornish coast and the Isles of Scilly was the obvious place to try and visit. The Winter of '97 was spent boning up on tidal sets, mercator projections, running fixes and all the other theory that I had ignored for more years than I cared to remember. I even enrolled on a RYA Yachtmasters Course.

The objective was to sail to the Scillies from Rock via St. Ives aiming to arrive at Tresco in daylight and then to spend several days exploring the islands before returning. The passage planning was important as it is essential to get the tides right owing to very strong currents which run up and down the Cornish Coast. This meant leaving Rock 1 hour before high water to catch the ebb down the coast. We also had to arrive at St. Ives 3 hours either side of high water as the harbour dries outside of these times. We decided July would be the best time to do the trip as we were more likely to get settled weather, and maximum daylight hours.

Wednesday, 29th July dawned with an acceptable weather forecast promising north-westerlies force 4 to 5 behind the cold front due to go through by mid morning. We left Rock as the front cleared at 11.15 with one reef in the main. Outside in the estuary the wind was force 5 with a short steep sea running. We beat up to Trevoise Head averaging 3 knots over the ground. When we turned at Trevoise we were able to free the wind and the speed picked up to 6 knots, still in a fairly rough sea. We had a lovely sail past Newquay but the wind started to back which meant we had to track in towards Godrevy Point just north of St. Ives. To get around the Stones Rocks some 3 miles north east of St. Ives meant putting on the motor in what was now turning into a very rough sea. We arrived in St. Ives 9 hours after leaving Rock and moored on a visitors mooring in the inner harbour. We had an excellent meal ashore and stayed in a delightful B & B.

The 30th July started with a beautiful morning, weather forecast north-westerly force 4 to 5. Nearly an ideal wind to get to the Scillies. Once outside the St. Ives breakwater we very soon ran into huge seas and the

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wind was getting up. We set off with a single reef in the main but soon put in a second. When some 6 miles offshore Falmouth Coastguard broadcast a strong wind warning, and the wind was backing. It was becoming very difficult to tack and our speed over the ground was a measly 2 knots or so. At times we were taking water green into the cockpit. It was too late to go back into St. Ives as the tide was out and the only option left was to turn for Rock. If we had continued we wouldn't have reached the Scillies until well after dark, not to be recommended as there are few lights on this treacherous coast.

Three hours after leaving St. Ives we were heading north-easterly broad reaching creaming along at over 6 knots, with 2 reefs in. Shortly afterwards Keith Best who was on the helm saw something "black" in the water. I then saw a fin a few feet from the cockpit, then another, and another. We were in the midst of a school of sharks! They disappeared but 15 mins later there was a loud bag and the boat nearly stopped dead in the water. I thought we had hit a submerged container. The centreboard came up and crashed down, the rudder was also hit and with that a very large shark appeared round the stern thrashing his tail and obviously very upset. Fortunately he felt he had enough head bashing for one day and swam away. Luckily the boat appeared undamaged, Phew!

We reached Trevoze Head 5 hours later with a very disturbed sea running and turned the corner for the Camel Estuary, arriving 45 mins later and showing over 7 knots on the log. A most exhilarating sail!

The lessons to be learnt are that you must wait for high pressure and have flexibility in your timings, fine in theory but we all have time constraints. Black Dog behaved superbly and never once did I feel that the boat would be unable to cope with what, at times, were quite severe conditions. The Spray Hood is an absolute must but the recently fitted log was useless on a port tack as the impeller came out of the water.

All in all a tremendous two days sailing. We will have another go next year, high pressure permitting.

Peter Skinner