

I like to make one lengthy passage in *Lady Eleanor* (921) each year, and during the winter of 2005, I was dithering between joining Martyn Todd (*Betsy* - 459) to the west of Scotland, or solo to the south west of Ireland, or two weeks in Falmouth for International Week. Eventually I decided on Falmouth and the Scillies, and spent hours planning the trip, poring over charts and tide timetables, eventually picking Tuesday 30th May to trail to Penzance. On arrival in Penzance, we rigged and launched in a force 6 northerly, and on the following morning (0520), the Met Office was forecasting force 5 or 6 northerlies. I reckon F.6 is a gale in a Shrimper, so announced that we would be staying put. However Neil is a techie. He subscribes to a website called 'windguru' and, by using his laptop and mobile phone, he was able to tell me that it was currently blowing a 16 knot northerly at the Seven Stones Light midway between Land's End and Scilly, that it had been dropping by the hour, and was predicted to drop to 12 knots by 12 noon. Perfect if it was true!

We left Penzance at 0800, agreeing on a contingency plan to turn back when we reached the Runnel Stone (about 12 miles away) if conditions were too bad. In fact the 'windguru' forecast was spot on, and we enjoyed the best day's passage I have experienced in 24 years of Shrimpering. We covered the 42 nautical miles from Penzance to St. Mary's Scilly in 9 hours of which only 25 minutes were on the motor. We picked up a visitor's mooring in Hugh Town Harbour at 1700, dined on board, and watched the sun set over the neighbouring Isle of Samson.

Much to the dismay of some of my more traditionalist Shrimper friends (especially Carlos from Portugal), I have fitted a lot of electronic aids to *Lady Eleanor*, and in the planning of this passage I was comforted by the thought of having two GPS sets (one hand-held and one fixed and wired in), two radios (one hand-held VHF, one DSC interfaced with my GPS), two compasses (one fluxgate and one hand-held), an autohelm, an EPIRB and a solar panel to charge the 85 amp hour battery.

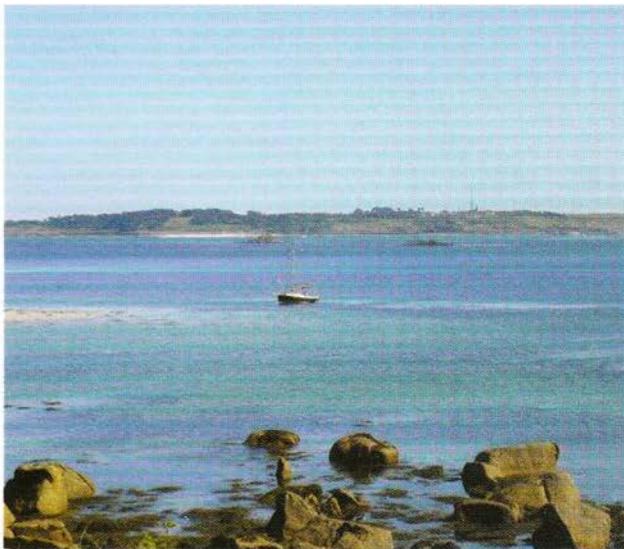
I also make sure I plot a course and make hourly calculations by dead reckoning. I chuckled to myself midway through the passage, well out of sight of land, when I realised I could have made landfall simply by following the steady stream of helicopters flying overhead from Penzance to St. Mary's, and the 700-passenger ferry to Hugh Town, which took 3 hours to pass us from the time it appeared on our horizon at the stern until it disappeared over the horizon off our bow.

Shrimpering to the Isles of Scilly – Roy Harper

After a peaceful night in Hugh Town Harbour, we were eating a hearty breakfast in the cockpit, when we were visited by the harbourmaster in his RIB. Upon seeing the size of the Shrimper, he offered us a berth much nearer the quay wall, and at a reduced rate from £14 down to £7 per night. This suited me well as my tender is a one-man inflatable with the delightful name of “*Billy No Mates*”. It is too small to row but paddles well, and stows easily into half of the stern locker.

Thursday was spent relaxing, and on Friday my wife Eleanor and Neil’s girlfriend Lisa flew into St. Mary’s airport from Bristol, to join us. Their flight had been booked two months in advance, so heaven only knows what would have happened had we been stormbound in Penzance. Luck favours the bold!

The four of us booked into a really homely B&B for a week spending each day sailing to, and walking around the five inhabited islands. Scilly is an ideal Shrimpering area. The sea is gin-clear, though a little cold for bathing, and the 50 or so islands form a large lagoon giving flat seas even in a strong breeze.

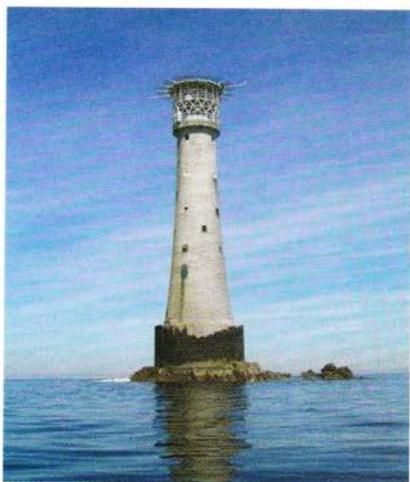


Lady Eleanor enjoying exploring the Scillies

The fishing is good, and the navigating through the shallow rock-strewn channels is absorbing. We found the transits and leading lines quoted in the pilot difficult to find, so we plotted waypoints on our GPS to skirt the hazards, sometimes as many as eight, giving us a zig-zag track for a three-mile passage. Each island is a little different, but all provide excellent walking with abundant flowers and wildlife.

We sat and watched some humming-bird hawk moths feeding on a flowering shrub for 15 minutes, while a frustrated solitary male cuckoo called constantly from a thicket behind us.

Shrimpering to the Isles of Scilly – Roy Harper



Bishop Rock Lighthouse

The highlight of our week was sailing out to round the Bishop Rock Lighthouse, in light airs, catching four large pollack on the way back for a BBQ.

My three companions left on Thursday 8th June to fly back to the mainland, and I had a few days solo, spending the nights at sheltered and secluded anchorages including St. Helen's Pool and Porth Conger, where I enjoyed a pint and supper in the Turk's Head, the most westerly pub in England. My friend Ray, a canal narrow-boat enthusiast, then flew out to join me as crew for the return passage. He had never sailed before but learnt very quickly and was super company.

I have 4 monogrammed coffee mugs on board, and at first he was given the "Cabin Boy's". He quickly graduated to "Crew", and smiled like a Cheshire Cat when on the return passage, I made him a coffee in the "First Mate's" mug!

I had allowed myself a long window of time to make the return trip, which was just as well as we had a spell of very brisk easterlies, and I am of the school that believes "Gentlemen don't sail to windward". These winds suddenly dropped, so we left St. Agnes at 0530 Wednesday 14th June, intending to make Penzance by mid-afternoon. Whereas we had experienced neap tides on the outward passage, we were now at springs and we motored through the sound between St. Agnes and St Mary's on a calm sea at 7 knots. There was no wind at all, but a huge Atlantic swell gave us a nasty rolling motion. This, combined with moderate visibility, made the lookout's job quite difficult whilst crossing the two shipping lanes. After six hours of motoring in zero wind and fair tide, we were five miles off Penzance, so made the decision to carry on past the Lizard to Helford or even Falmouth. We eventually berthed at Mylor Yacht Haven in the Fal Estuary, having covered 62 miles in 13 ½ hours, tired but happy. It was wonderful to meet up with so many of my fellow Shrimper friends for the International Week in Falmouth, but that is another story.

Roy Harper *Lady Eleanor (921)*