

Allons à Lorient

We had originally intended to sail our Shrimper 21 *Tikki Dym* (26) to the Vilaine river and up through the canal de Iles et Rance to St Malo, but winter flooding damaged the lock gates at Mill Boel, closing the Vilaine until 2026. This left us looking for an alternative trip for summer 2025.

Our winter discussions fixed upon going to Brittany, preferably the southern coast, as it promised warmer weather and gentler tides. We wished to sail, but our insurers refused to cover us for a channel crossing saying our boat was too small. As we had already completed trips to the Scillies and Milford Haven, we felt that a channel crossing with the right weather window was quite manageable. Being in our late 60's, we also realised that the opportunity to be a little adventurous might not come around again. As a result we decided to “proceed at risk” and ignore our insurers. We fixed our dates, 1st June to 17th July and prepared. Jonathan bought a Gennaker, I bought a personal locator attached to my lifejacket and we had another for the boat in a grab bag. We also bought an inflatable danbuoy which is stored in a box by the tiller. Other than courtesy flags, everything else we required was available from our previous trips.

May was lovely and warm with gentle northerlies, then June arrived with rain and strong south westerlies, leaving us to wait until the 7th when it went more to the west and settled. We left Rock, with two on board (we had planned for three but the delay lost one of our crew to a holiday) in light drizzle on the tide, headed for Le Conquet at the southern end of the Chanel de Four. The harbour master originally told us we could not get in as the harbour could only take small boats. Once we told him our dimensions, he was happy, but said he would not be there on the Monday and would see us the following day. A more relaxed approach to border controls than we had expected.



Once into the Bristol Channel, we hit a large swell, which soon had me vomiting over the side, not an auspicious start and getting colder by the hour, we decided to head for St Ives and anchored off the harbour mouth at about 2100 at low water. After a few hours sleep we were on our way again at 0500, still into a big (2.5-3m) swell. We had to motor as there was little wind. The sea state settled after Pendeen and we were able to sail from about 0800 until just after midnight when the wind died. We continued on engine, bringing up the Ouessant light just before dawn. A few hours motoring down the Cheneval de four saw us arrive at Le Conquet about 1100 on 9th July.

No one came to find us, so we went ashore for refreshments and food. The next day we presented ourselves to the harbour office. After 30 minutes of form filling, we paid for the mooring. I asked about entry into Schengen and presented our customs declaration. This was duly photocopied and we were wished a pleasant stay. Throughout the trip no one asked to see our passports. We found out that we had made our way onto a customs database a few days later.

The next day saw us head south on the afternoon tide, through the Raz de Sein, a headland with a significant reputation. As we drifted, in light winds, bearing 048 deg, we were making 6kt over the ground heading 180 deg! At 2140 we sailed behind the breakwater at St Evette and picked up a buoy for the night.

With little wind forecast, we had 24 hours in the marina at Audierne, a very friendly little town. We refuelled and discovered a lovely restaurant, Cap Africa, doing barbecued sea bass (plus local beers) for lunch. We followed up with moules frites for supper and felt ready for the warm south the following day.

We left for the Pointe de PenMarc'h under grey skies at dawn, sailing down towards the two lights on the point. Within an hour they disappeared and we were in driving rain and lightning. An hour later we were in full sun and sailing on a broad reach. The rest of the day was hopping from buoy to buoy to Loctudy, the only problem being our broken autohelm, which died due to water ingress on the crossing. We managed to buy a replacement from Force 4 in Plymouth for Anne (my wife and 3rd crew member) to pick it up en route to the Roscoff ferry as she came to join us in Loctudy.



Loctudy harbour mouth from the bar

We were now in a gentler climate, one with warmth, sun and little wind. The ensuing days saw gentle sails or motor sails to Benodet (5 nm) with a charming marina and very friendly captain, the Isle de Glenan (12nm) at anchor, Doelan (16nm) for lunch on the quay (plus buying fish off one of the local boats) and Le Pouldu (5nm). Le Pouldu gave us a beautiful anchorage, on sand, up the river with no one about except birds. We took a gentle trip upriver with the tide the following morning and then went to the Ile de Groix (Port Tudy 18nm) on the ebb. We had a lovely meal in Ti Beudeff, recommended by a pair of elderly British sailors who had been cruising the area for over 20 years.



A quiet anchorage La Laita river, Busier on the Ile De Groix Port Tudy, and off Concarneau



On the 18th we went to the marina at Lorient, next to the U boat pens, for a crew change. Annie and I left for a week in Finisterre, and John arrived to sail with Jonathan for a week. More gentle sailing followed with some adventure due to the jib attachment to the bowsprit parting (successfully re-attached with a bolt) and the metal attachment for the kicking strap giving way (repaired with a rope around the mast foot). We also had continuing problems with the alternator slipping and needing re-tightening, something we have experienced before.

Jonathan and John, enjoyed a cruise from Lorient to Groix, Doelan, Belon river, Concarneau and the Isles des Glenan, sampling the best seafood on offer in southern Brittany. Jonathan vowed to eat seafood on every day of the trip and managed to achieve this without much difficulty. After a week, we met up in Le Guilvinec, a fishing port on the Cote de Cornouaille. We swapped crews and headed for Audierne. From there we had intended to head to Guernsey and thence to Dartmouth or Salcombe before trailing *Tykei Dym* home. However the best laid plans...Annie and I were joined by our friend Paul at Audierne and Jonathan headed off to Quiberon and La Trinite to admire the big French multihulls. We returned to Le Conquet on a breezy and dull day, and then the next day continued up to L'Aber Wrac'h, with the tide, enjoying a lovely broad reach past Le Four lighthouse, one of the major landmarks of Finisterre.

We arrived in the evening and motored upriver, picking up a vacant buoy for the night. A seafood paella was cooked onboard and we slept well with only the sound of birds for company.



Dining on-board and dining ashore

The next day we headed east to Roscoff along the coast, punching tide under engine initially. We discovered that the Autohlem ST1000 is vulnerable to the sun as it overheated and had to be put below to cool off for an hour at one point. It spent the rest of the day under a towel to keep the sun off.

Roscoff marina is a very friendly place (the highest fees at €29/night) and used by a lot of boats for crew changes. Paul left for Plymouth the next day. Annie and I headed out to the Morlaix river. This is tidal and the harbour only opens for 90 minutes around high water, so few boats make the trip. We enjoyed a lovely sail through the rocky entrance to the river and then ghosted upriver on the tide for most of the ten miles to the harbour. The harbour master is very friendly, but there are a lot of very sad looking boats (a few British) that looked abandoned. The town had been a big cigarette manufacturing base in the 1920's and the old factory is still being brought back into use as museum/offices, so it has a slightly down at heel air to it. We spent one night and came away on the morning ebb after coffee and croissants in town.



Impressive rocks and towers at the entrance to the Rade de Morlaix

We spent a couple of days around Roscoff, which is a pretty town with good restaurants and a lovely exotic flower garden near the marina. We also spent a night at anchor on the Ile de Batz, at Ile des Moutons, before Annie headed south to friends in the car. We had been watching the wind forecasts with care at the beginning of July and there was a clear weather window to sail back to Padstow, or we could continue east, with the prospect of being wind bound by northerlies on the French coast or Guernsey. A brief discussion saw us heading back to L'Aber Wrac'h late morning on the 3rd July. We arrived at 1800 and were allowed to stop in the marina for free for six hours (we offered to pay, but the capitain said, "we are not pirates."). A final meal at L'Ecailler des Abers and a short sleep saw us depart at 0010 on 4th July.

With light winds we motor-sailed most of the way across the channel running a 2 hourly watch. We were able to sail from about 1730 from near Wolf rock up past the Longships, but then had to motor up to just south of St Ives. There was a near miss with a fishing boat (we were temporarily distracted by the autohelm playing up and there was no one on deck on the fishing boat!) a mile off St Ives. Apart from this, we had an uneventful crossing until the wind got up near St Agnes head. We reefed at 0300 and continued at a good lick past Trevoise head, arriving back on the Rock pontoon at 0700 on 5th July, again in light drizzle.

Summary

We sailed about 680 nm in 27 days (7/6/25 to 5/7/25), mostly in light winds, with quite a lot of motor-sailing. We used about 60 litres of diesel, half on the channel crossings. The gennaker was useful in light winds, but the wind window for its optimal use is narrow (4-10kt). If you are happy motor-sailing this could be foregone. We ran two hourly watches on the night passages, this worked very well and gave everyone enough rest.

Having sandwiches prepared allowed us to eat without having to heat food if it was rough. We ate a lot of ginger nuts as well! We have a sea toilet (with holding tank), an important safety feature on passage making. We carry 40 litres of water, which will last a few days before needing top up.

We had a number of useful cruising apps, particularly Windy and Navily. Paper charts work well if in plastic covers, they can be stored under bunk cushions. We have a small Raymarine plotter, which is invaluable. We do not have AIS, some of our friends said we were mad to go without. I grew up crossing the channel without plotters and AIS, so I felt our approach was quite safe. There were few ships in the western channel, all easily visible, our only near miss was off St Ives and would not have been altered by AIS. We took especial care to avoid going if fog was forecast. We used marinas and small harbours to allow washing and showers, with the odd night at anchor or on a buoy. Marina fees varied from 13-29 euro/night for a Shrimper 21. The French harbour authorities were universally friendly and helpful. They all said that they loved our “Jolie petit bateau” The seafood was excellent throughout our trip and mostly cheaper than in the UK. The weather south of the Raz de Sein was notably warmer than on the north coast of Brittany. June is a great time to go as there are no school holidays, so the marinas and restaurants are quiet.

Breakages:

As ever, cruising any distance takes its toll on a boat. We had a few breakages, none particularly serious, but all irritating.

1. Autohelm ST 1000. Water ingress during the first two days caused it to fail. We have dried it out, but it was irreparable. We had to replace it (£499). When we put the new one on, we discovered that it had been incorrectly installed originally. We have ordered the necessary extension parts, but anyone wanting one in a Shrimper 21 is well advised to look at the installation manual in detail.

2. Jib attachment, we think the pin fell out, despite having a split pin taped over. We replaced it with a bolt and nylox nut.

3. Kicking strap attachment on tabernacle. Clearly under-engineered for anything other than light winds. We will be improving this in the winter.

4. Slipping alternator, leads to discharging batteries. A continuing problem over several years, we had to re-tighten every few days. We think we have a fix after reading several posts online.