

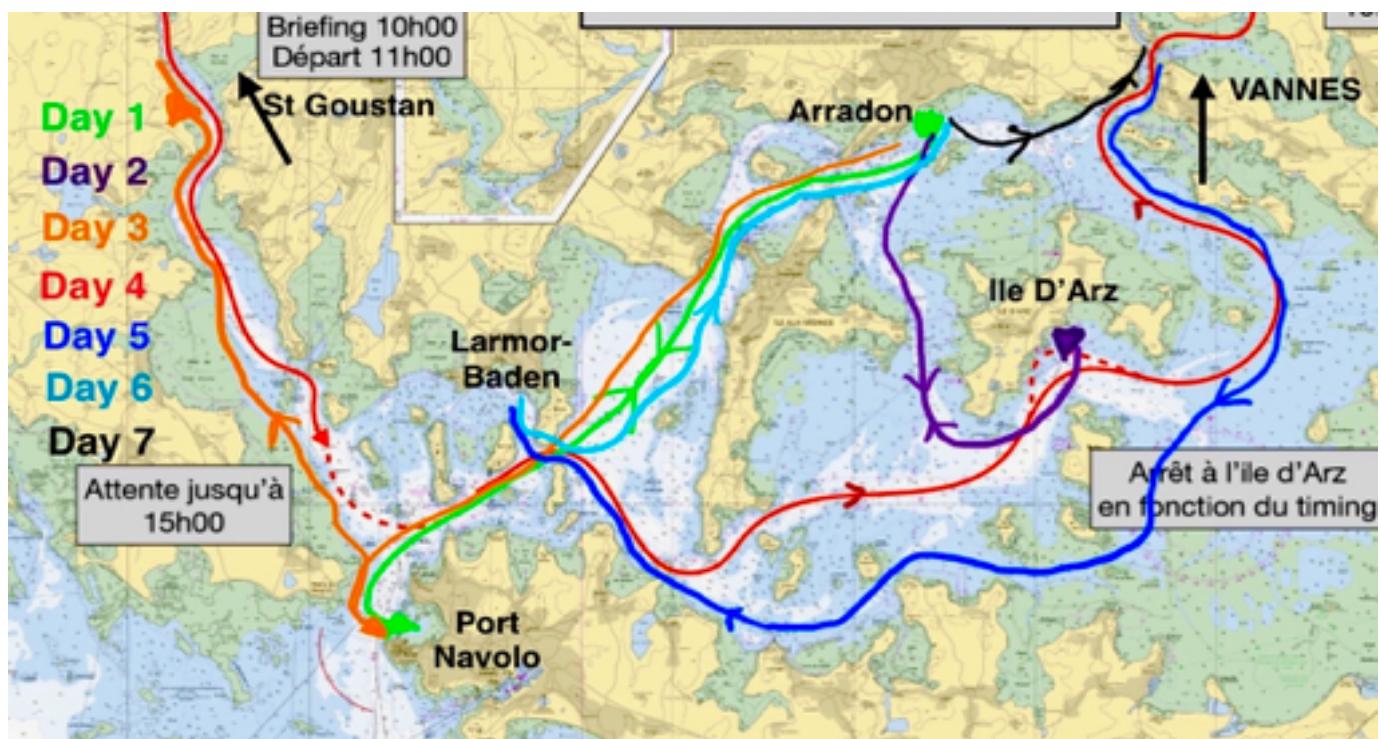
La Semaine du Golfe June 2025 by Catherine Lee-Elliott

We hardly dare admit our disloyalty to the Shrimper family, but last year we wondered whether it was time for standing headroom down below, and test-drove a Bay Cruiser out of Torquay. It was not for us. However, the owner mentioned that the entry for La Semaine du Golfe had just opened, and we were intrigued. It did not take long to find useful and exciting logs of other shrimpers who had been to the area and the event, so we hurriedly applied for a place and waited.

Accounts of the event - over 1,000 boats cruising together in up to 9 knots of tide in a bay not much larger than Poole Harbour, were terrifying! However, the lure of a free week-long festival of art, food and music hosted at multiple ports around the gulf was too great to resist. We read about how well supported the event was by local businesses and an army of enthusiastic volunteers, but had almost forgotten about it when 3 months later, in September 2024, we received an email stating that we were in!

Duolingo was downloaded and the translation for useful things such as 'slipway' and 'crane lifter' were memorised. The people who usually transport our boat for us agreed that they would like a holiday in France for a week, so we were all set.

A few weeks prior to departure, we were able to download an app for the event, packed full of useful information. We found our fleet and could see who else was in it, enabling us to contact another UK-based Shrimper 21 who was attending and share information.



The app contained all of the food and entertainment options for each day, and we could book and pay for some of these in advance. Most importantly, there was (in French) a 50-page kayakers' guide to the harbour, noting all of the hazardous areas of navigation in particular the narrow entrance at the south-west corner through which so much tidal water flows. We studied the accompanying text for the red and orange arrows on the chart very carefully; it was detailed and extremely useful.



Thursday 22nd May

The Golfe du Morbihan is an easy 5-hour dual carriageway drive from Cherbourg. We opted for an overnight crossing to give us the whole day for the drive, rigging, and launching and so we arrived on Thursday 22nd June to find the slipway at Arradon hot, calm and deserted. We rigged got a spot on the slipway and waited for the tide to rise a little further while eating a delicious lunch from the pop-up restaurant nearby. Meanwhile, a queue started to form behind us. We had read about this legendary queue, which lasted for the next four days and at one point was 50 boats long, right back to the roundabout in town!



Boats queuing to launch at the Arradon slipway

As we slipped Samphire off the trailer, all the hard work over the winter of replacing our batteries along with other mainly comfort related mods suddenly seemed so worth it. Well just for a split second, because when we put her into reverse, the motor was dead! We were adrift in a swift incoming tide heading towards the shallows. Fortunately, we just managed to get a line ashore.

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The fix was to depress the isolator switch fully, a basic error. Much relieved we motored round to the (fully serviced) visitors' pontoon, which was our home for the next six nights, a peaceful spot with harbour views and all sorts of gathering whilst overlooking a fancy restaurant.

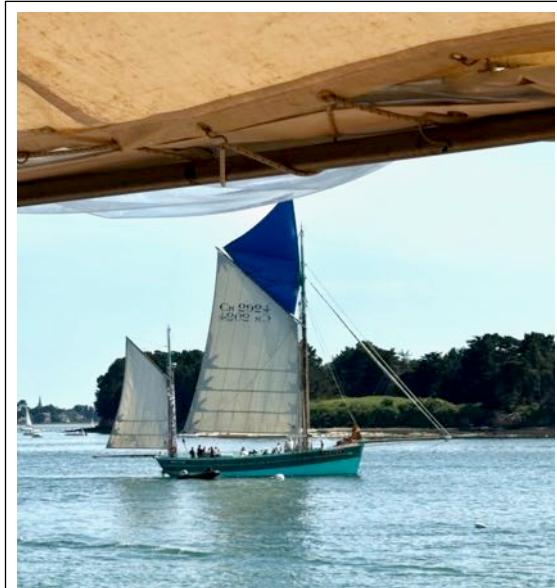


The view from our visitor's berth

There were three flotillas located at Arradon which was our base port for the event. Our flotilla ('Petit Habitables' under 7m) had 200 boats. There were in total two showers and three toilets ashore - for all three flotillas - shared between both men and women! Needless to say, ablutions were undertaken at the crack of dawn or late into the evening.

We spent the next few days, before the event officially started, exploring the town and countryside by bike (newly acquired eBay foldaway) and foot. Also we got to know the Cape Cutter sailors who were in

our flotilla (mostly UK-based and one lovely French helm who became our translator at the morning briefings). We started to realise just how huge the event was going to be, even advertised on the end of each supermarket aisle! We ate outside most evenings at the shoreside lobster restaurant - what a view!



Monday 26th May

We had almost forgotten we were here to sail! Briefing was outside the sailing club - not much to be understood except that we had to pick up mooring buoys in a bay *just inside* the harbour entrance. Ribs would take us ashore for lunch. The key message was to get into said little bay *and not be swept past* and therefore out, by the five knots falling tide, into the Atlantic! We also had to travel via - at nine knots - the fastest tidal race of the harbour, the Jument.



A typical arrival scene – hundreds of boats of all shapes and sizes

It was blowing F5-6 and drizzling. The helm was hesitant, but the crew insistent! We were soon amongst a huge and gathering procession uniting from all corners of the harbour, all heading for the same bay. There were all manner of craft from huge galleons to tiny wooden canoes with small sails. It was an incredible feeling and gave us a great buzz. Samphire had to duck under the outriggers of this traditional fishing vessel (and daily for the rest of the week!).



Samphire navigating the Jument and a traditional trawling vessel with huge outriggers



We managed to navigate the 'Jument' unscathed with furled jib and two reefs despite having very little steerage and a huge galleon coming through and past us. Then we rafted up with four of our new Cape Cutter buddies on a mooring and watched everyone arrive. So many boats! Over 1,400 were registered! We were all soon picked up and taken ashore to a festival with all manner of street food and a market. The return trip was less stressful - we were, of course, now pros! Until we arrived to find our Arradon visitors' berth had been taken. We had to join a seven-boat raft up on the most exposed end of the pontoon. The smallest, oldest, and most fragile wooden boat was on the inside, and a large, heavy cruiser was on the outside! Most crews left to sleep ashore either home or camping. We wondered how we would fare onboard all night with the breeze still blowing quite hard. Another lobster and a bottle of chilled white did the trick!

Tuesday, 27th May

The traditional picnic on Ile D'Arz (pictured), is one of the two larger islands inside the harbour about the size of Brownsea in Poole. The morning briefing confirmed - just a short four-mile sail there with no tidal hazards, pick up a free mooring, and volunteer ribs will ferry us in. Today it was properly raining, but we were keen to get free from the raft up, so off we went into the gloom. Again, it was thrilling to join so many boats of all sorts.



Picnic on Ile D'Arz and how to shin up a Shrimper mast – find a French sailor

Once ashore, we were met with enthusiastic traditional Breton music playing and a hot three-course meal, picnic style - only in France! Afterwards we walked up to the pretty little hamlet. When we returned to Samphire, we noticed our burgee string had parted and become entangled with the halyards at the top of the mast. We motored home with 25 knots still blowing and wondered how we were going to drop the mast whilst bobbing around at the end of another raft up. As we drank a cup of tea, deep in thought/anxiety, an agile French sailor noticed our plight, and before we could stop him, he shinned up the mast and sorted it all out.

Wednesday, 28th May

Briefing today confirmed that this was our first big trip - out to the little bay inside the harbour entrance again for lunch (don't get swept out!) - ribs ashore, then in the afternoon, all the way up the river Auray to the Port de St Goustin for the night. We made it safely to an excellent lunch but one poor Cape Cutter missed the turning into the bay, was swept out of harbour and needed a tow back. In the afternoon we had a beautiful sail all the way up the river to St Goustin. A huge crowd lined the river banks for our arrival. We were to head right up to the bridge, u-turn and then the harbour master would tell us where to park.



We hadn't realised quite how strong the current was but we completed the manoeuvre without issue - unlike the poor chap wedged under the bridge. (pictured above). We managed to persuade the harbour master to allow us to plug in for some 'fuel' at the river taxi pontoon (whilst everyone else was rafted 10 plus on river moorings). Marian persuaded one of the army of volunteers to direct her to the shower block whilst charging the batteries. She was probably the only clean person that evening. There was a bagpipe and drums parading band to welcome us ashore to the lovely historic town. Outdoor paella and pudding was followed by some excellent grooves from the band on the stage overlooking the river.

Thursday 29th May

Briefing in the rain today for another big day's sailing all the way to Vannes. However the sun came out resulting in a lovely sail to the mouth of the river leading up to Vannes. Unfortunately access to the river is controlled by a swing bridge and there was a long procession of hundreds of boats trying to get into the town centre. It took ages. We couldn't believe we would all fit in!

Once ashore it was worth the wait - the town was alive with music all around with a spectacular laser show in the evening.



The Laser Show at Vannes

Friday 30th May

By now, the foldaway bike had proven itself essential to make it in time for a dawn shower. Bliss. We stocked up on fresh baguettes and pastries, ready for another long sail through the tranquil eastern side of the harbour to Le Logeo for lunch and then what was to become for us, the grand finale of Larmor Baden. The weather had really changed, and it was now hot and still.

We spent the morning gently motoring past dotted, beautiful remote islets—paradise. Having stopped for lunch on a mooring, we completed the journey—crossing the infamous Jument tidal race at an unbelievable angle (I wish we could embed the video in here!)—to arrive, sweltering, at Larmor Baden.



The tranquil anchorage at Larmor Baden

There was a hog roast and local cider— first by the glass but then by the jug (after jug)— with all of our new friends. As the sun set and some fabulous music played on the stage, we really didn't want it to be over. The event requires you to get a card stamped in every port that you journey to, and if you get a full card, you get a lovely enamel plaque for your boat as a memento of the trip.

Saturday, 31st June

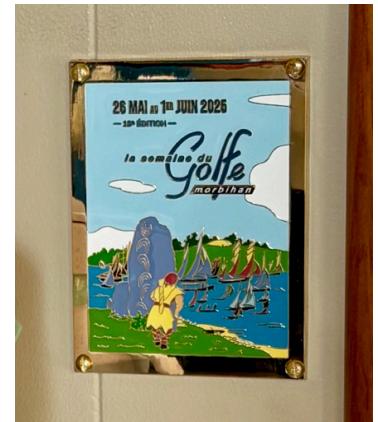
This was supposed to be a grand parade out of the harbour entrance and then all the way back up to Vannes for the final party. But the head was hurting, and a shower was calling. We left Larmor Baden early making our way back to where we had started in Arradon.

We showered and packed away the boat and then waited for the huge parade of boats to pass us in the afternoon on their way back up to Vannes. Slowly, most of our Cape Cutter friends arrived back in Arradon with the same plan, and we all chilled out together for the final parade, marvelling at the throng of French tourists watching too.

Sunday, 1st June

Another early start to motor to Vannes for the crane out, which I *hoped* I had booked in my best duolingo French. I wasn't convinced a French crane operator would be up so early on a Sunday morning and felt very nervous for our ferry booking. However, he was working full pelt as we rounded the corner and soon had us (safely) in the slings.

With Samphire once again secured on the trailer we had the day free to wander into Vannes for one last look at all the boats. A thoroughly enjoyable trip and one we hope to repeat.



The final parade at Vannes and our enamel plaque memento of the trip