

## Cruising the Baltic single handed (mostly) – Florian Bertzbach

This had been a dream for a long time: to sail around the Baltic Sea with almost no time limit. The only limitation was to leave at the start of spring (for various reasons not until the end of April), and be back by the start of the holidays at the end of June when it gets very busy in Baltic harbours.



On April 29th I started from Bremen after the trailer had been fitted with new tyres. Next day my Shrimper *Suse von der Lesum* (1139) was craned into her element at Arnis on the Schlei. Lisa, a friend of mine, was able to keep the trailer in her garden throughout the entire trip. After a few days of equipment and test sailings, we set off on the afternoon of May 3rd. The forecast promised some wild sailing, so Lisa spontaneously decided to join me on the first leg.

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Nothing came of the wild sailing, the wind died down, and at 2300 we reached Søby in Denmark in the dark and under engine. After a nice dinner we snuggled up in the bunks. The next day Lisa travelled back by ferry and I set off on the first short trip to Avernakø, just 7NM away. At this time of year, the Baltic Sea ports are empty, so only two other sailors were in harbour and there was lots of free space. Because of the wind that came up at night, I moored diagonally between the post and the pontoon so as not to put a cross-load on the bowsprit through the mooring lines. With a Shrimper 19 you are always one of the smallest boats in port and you get looked at and admired. But your size also means the posts are quite a long way away and you need very long ropes.

From Avernakø I continued via Sønderborg where a friend, Lennart, came on board for three days to join me to Kolding. We met friends in Arø Sund then continued to Kolding. On our way the rotten end of the spinnaker pole broke. We then sailed through a shallow area where a fisherman was standing knee-deep (that meant it was too shallow even for a shrimper!), and had a night at anchor before continuing under spinnaker alone to a pub in Kolding. I had to take a break at Kolding and go back to Bremen for ten days while the boat stayed in the harbour. Kolding is nothing special as a destination port, but the rail connection to Bremen is good.

Back on board the voyage finally started: I raised the number one flag - the symbol of single-handed sailors - and headed north! After a short stay in Middelfart (not recommended), the next port was Bogense on the north side of Fyn (highly recommended). After a short tack the wind died, but the waves remained which is not a good combination so it was time for the diesel. (One of Denmark's first wind turbines, a concrete tower from 1944, is in Bogense). Due to the weather, my *Suse von der Lesum* was only able to set off again three days later. This gave me time to shorten the spinnaker pole and fix a new end.



*The single-handed sailor*



Next stop was Endelave 15NM away. By the way, did I say spinnaker? Yes, at the beginning of the trip I borrowed a spinnaker from a 470 dinghy. It is big enough that it doesn't look ridiculous and yet small enough that it is easy to use single-handed. (Later in the year I changed to one from a 505 dinghy which was bigger and much more fun!) I note from the logbook that I sailed the whole leg without touching the sails and rudder. This would also be the case on the trip to Tunø, the island on which the church tower is also a lighthouse. With a tiller pilot, distances of 15NM are a small hop. Making coffee and sandwiches on the go, no problem, sketching lighthouses, no problem. It was starting to feel like I was sailing around the world - ok a small world!



In Tunø I unexpectedly met a friend from Bremen who also sails single-handed in his much larger yacht. We decided to continue sailing together towards Aarhus the next day. I had been concerned that he would be much faster, but a Shrimper with full canvas and spinnaker could keep up with Marco with a gennaker. That was fine as long the wind kept up, but when we switched to the engine, he was significantly faster. An hour later, after a wind shift of 180 degrees and rising to force 2-3, the remaining 10 miles had to be tacked. The anchor was then dropped in the small, beautiful narrow bay of Knebel Vig where I arrived about an hour after Marco. (see front cover photograph)

After a short break to get a grill, food and whatever else you need for a cozy evening ashore, we used our 'Shrimper-ferry' to take us to the stony beach. Sat by the barbecue we sipped a nice cold beer; with the Shrimper waiting in knee-deep water to take us back late at night. Since Kolding I had kept a cooling backpack on board filled with cold drinks, frozen shrimps, or meat. With added ice cubes the cold beer lasted at least a day. Despite the solar panel, there isn't enough electricity and space on board for an active cool box.

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In Knebel Vig our ways parted again. My next destination: Aarhus. The student city has a lot to offer, a huge, very comfortable marina, nice pubs a short walk away and the Aros art museum, where I spent a day. Knebel Vig then was to be the northernmost point of my journey. Since I wanted to meet my wife in southern Denmark at the end of June, I had to think about how I would get there again in good time. The easiest way was to sail – turn so that the wind comes from astern, set the spinnaker and go. And that is just what happened: next stop Samsø. Since strong westerly winds were forecast for the next few days Ballen on Samsø's east shore was a good choice. On the way you pass some small islands with sandy beaches directly east of Samsø. Only the palm trees are missing to make you feel like you are in the South Seas. And this is where a Shrimper comes into its own: swimming from the flat sandy beach, cooking lunch, taking a nap, and then, with a nice cup of freshly brewed coffee in your hand, watching the seals enjoying the sun in the shallow water just off the beach. .



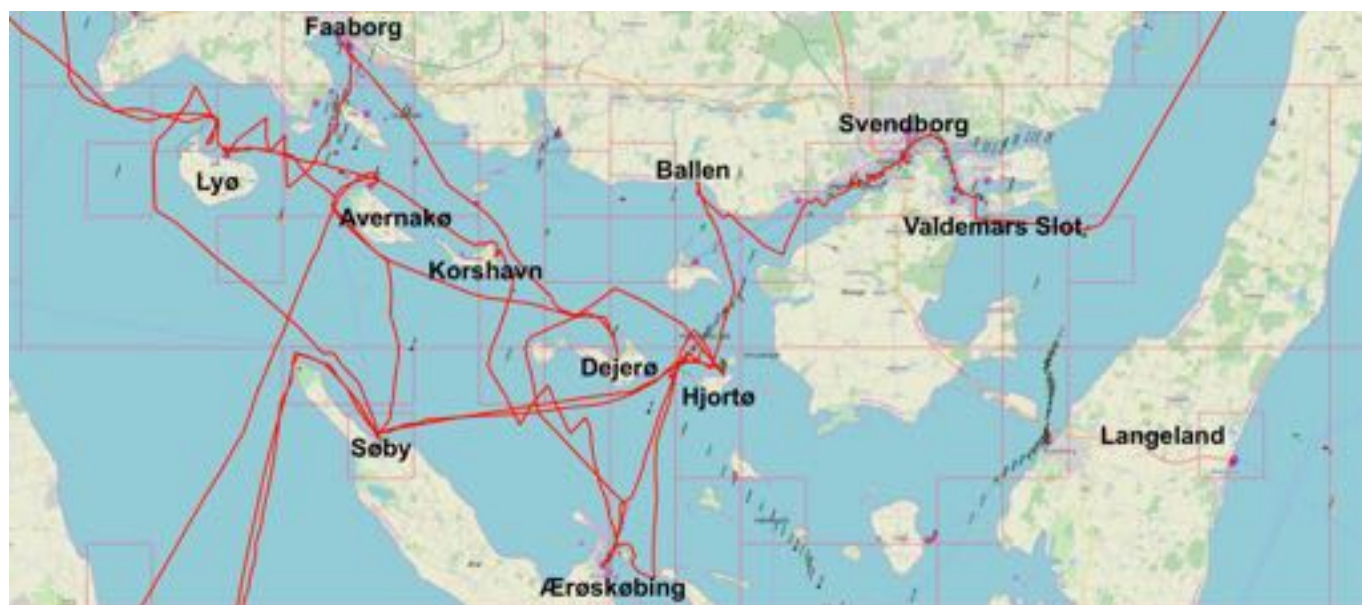
The two most exciting trips were still ahead. We sailed from Samsø to Kerteminde with a westerly 5-6, two reefs and a good bit of open sea from the west, before Fyn's coast brought some shelter again. Here there was finally some wild sailing; with the swell rolling under the hull, you really feel at one with the sea! With an average speed of 6.2 knots and a maximum speed of 8 knots (the current running with a knot helped a bit), it was wild, rolling fun with the skipper himself at the helm because the tiller pilot was overwhelmed.





In Kerteminde, after a day off to visit the Viking Museum and the Johannes Larsson Museum (both recommended), we had the second wild ride. On a reach with two reefs the boat raced towards Omø along with a 31-foot Laurin Coster - my neighbour from the harbour at Kerteminde, who, only just a mile before Omø, finally overtook me.

The biggest challenge on a trip with small boats is timing; if you want to be at a certain meeting point on a certain date, you must plan it in advance making allowance for the weather. I still had ten days before my wife wanted to come on board in Søby. The wind was likely to be blowing strongly from the west, so it looked like I was faced with a long and hard tack across the Great Belt, rounding Langeland's north end and passing a leeward shore. Not possible in my opinion. That is why I decided to go at night - there is less wind, and calm was forecast for the following evening. So, I got out of my warm bunk at 0100, mounted the radar reflector to be on the safe side, observed the traffic on the mobile using AIS and crossed the Great Belt using the motor.



With the first daylight west of Langeland I reached a small buoyed passage to Svendborgsund, crossed the shallow Vresenflak, and anchored in the shelter of Valdémars Slot. I made it just in time in front of a wall of dark black clouds. I then caught up on the sleep I had missed; there is nothing better than a sheltered place in rain and storm! That was the weather turning point, a strong westerly wind was forecast and was expected to stay for the next few days. Time for some days in Svendborg where there is a small pleasure boat museum that is well worth seeing. I also had the opportunity to visit the three-masted full-rigged “*Georg Stage*,” a training ship for aspiring mariners.

From Svendborg I decided to tack to Ballen/Fyn, just 5NM but with heavy rain and squalls up to force 7 predicted. However, the wind does not always stick to the forecast, so next day I anchored with W 3-4 sheltered behind the small island of Dejerø. From there it was just around the corner to visit ‘Flaske Peter’s’ small bottle ship museum in Ærøskøbing. At the turn of the century, as a sailor Peter made hundreds of ships in bottles as part of a social project, which came back to Ærøskøbing via a collector in the USA. Worth seeing.

The weather forecast promised further westerly winds, but the strength was decreasing. I decided to sail to Avernakø again. On a wild tacking course *Suse von der Lesum* played with the short waves of the Baltic and I was happy and amazed at how well and quickly we were making progress. We found an anchorage in a westerly sheltered spot. However, the wind didn’t stick to the forecast and turned southerly during the night so I pulled up the anchor at 0300 and motored for ten minutes round the corner to a new place sheltered from the south.

After a deep and restful night’s sleep followed by a good breakfast, I sailed to Lyø in a now light southerly wind. The weather was becoming more unsettled, so I had a washing day in port (and I baked rolls in the galley of the marina).

Next morning sunshine again and the forecast for another day of southerly winds, which should then turn westerly. It was time to spinnaker again, so I set off under sail (and the cheers of the neighbouring boat’s crew) towards Baagø, the island where I had explored the cliffs as a 10-year-old boy. We raced 22 NM through the Baltic Sea under spinnaker and in bright sunshine in just over 4 hours. After a day’s break and a walk on the island (I didn’t recognize anything!), we headed back with the westerly wind as promised.



The anchor was dropped at Helnæs Bay in two meters (pictured above) around 1600. This time the wind kept its promise and the poker game had worked out.

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Next morning it felt completely calm, but that was just the trees providing a windbreak. We came to the open sea and met a force 4-5. Two reefs were furled and we tacked out of the bay and then raced back to Lyø, where at around 1600 the anchor was dropped in an area protected behind a low breakwater. I watched wind surfers and the wind whistled in the rigging, but the water was as smooth as a village pond thanks to the shelter of the land. I had arrived there just in time for my wife's arrival in Søby. We spent the next 10 days in the Danish southern waters, sailing from island to island. We were particularly impressed with Hjortø, and stayed alone in the tiny harbour (in contrast to Lyø, where we got the last available place). On Hjortø there are just 4 residents, but we found a clean shower and a freezer in which we cooled our wine.



*Hjortø Harbour and Ærøskøbing before the rain*

On July 1st my wife left the boat again and drove the car back to Bremen. I started off for the Schlei, quickly slipping round the west hook of Ærøskøbing before a rain front passed a few miles west. The rain caught me 4 hours later approaching the Schlei - visibility down to less than 50m and I was nearly blind for 10 minutes.

At 1815 the anchor was dropped for the last time. The next day I had the boat craned onto the trailer. I had had a wonderful adventure sailing almost 500NM mostly single handed on the Baltic Sea and had certainly chosen the best time to go. Out of the main season there is always a place in the South Baltic harbours for small boats.



