

St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

A new trip in 2024

It's been 5 years since I sailed *Sparrow* from Woodbridge to Falmouth and mostly day sailing around Carrick Roads with the occasional overnight in Helford or Mevagissey since returning to Cornwall. So it was high time for something different. Part 1 was to port hop to the Solent to meet up with two other adventurous Shrimpers. Part 2 was to sail as a 3 boat fleet to Dover, cross over to Calais, up the coast to Antwerp and onwards to Amsterdam via the Dutch inland waters. Part 3 involved leaving our boats in Holland for a couple of weeks and return with our trailers in early June to take part in ISW 2024 (International Shrimper Week), where more Shrimpers from the UK and Holland would be gathering for 10 days sailing on the Makameer and Ijselemeer. So it was 'Goodbye' to St Just Creek for a few months.

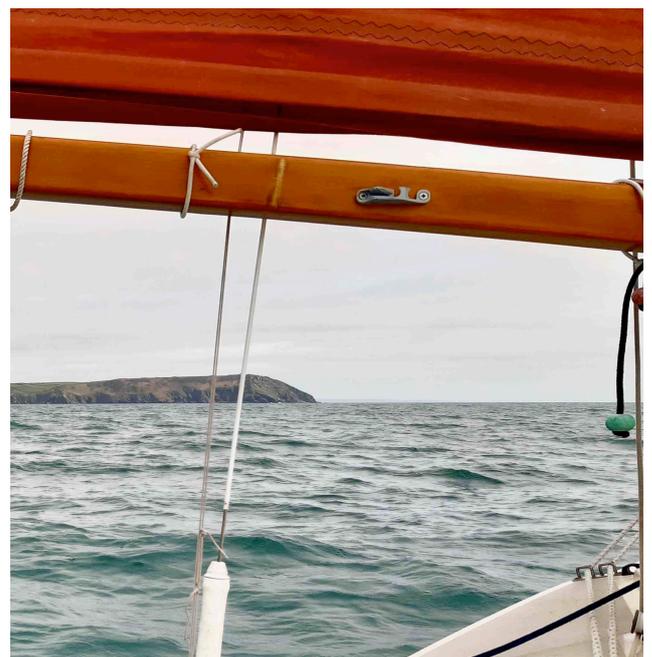


Chart courtesy of Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson www.imray.com

St. Just to Fowey 13th April

The weather looked good for the first leg over the weekend of 13th and 14th April so the decision was made to head east and at least get to Plymouth before the next gale. Brother-in-law Iain and I left Pasco's pontoon in St Just at 1000 and had a lively run with wind behind us up to Fowey. Rough seas off the Dodman and entrance to Fowey weren't much fun but we arrived without incident, accompanied by about 15 racing yachts making the same trip as us.

Approaching The Dodman



Fowey to Saltash, 14th April

From now on I would be sailing largely single-handed and I woke up to a much calmer Fowey harbour. After a quick breakfast and dropping into the harbour office to pay my dues, I headed out on to a calm sea at 0800. A pity I hadn't got to Looe for a first visit but Fowey is always a great place to stop over.

A fickle following wind meant that I motor sailed for an hour or so, before the wind finally settled to the south west force 3 which was ideal for my passage. For most of the time I had the sea to myself just soaking in the views of the coast and the tranquillity of the sea. By the time I reached Rame Head the wind had increased to force 4. I turned into Cawsand Bay to drop the sails.

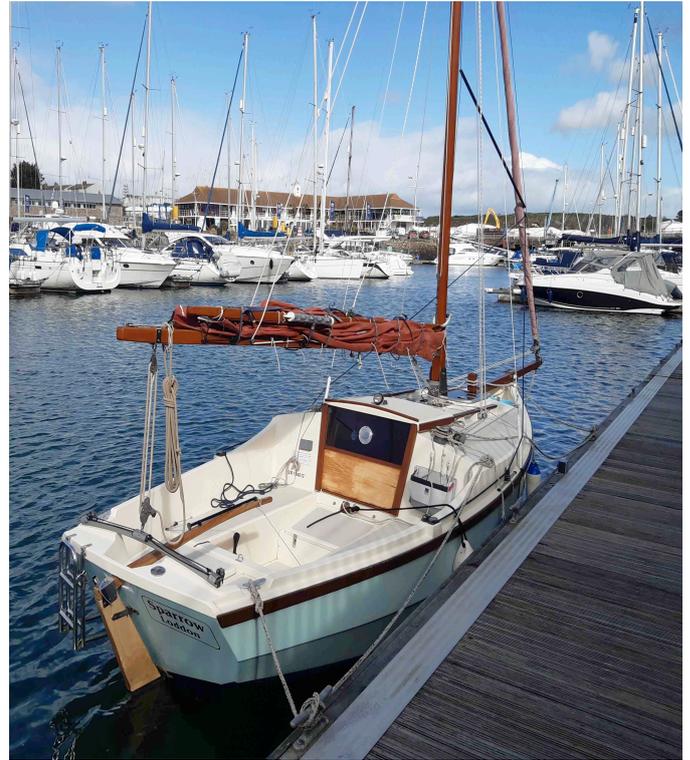
In a conversation just before leaving the pontoon in Fowey I was told about a very friendly sailing club at Saltash where I might be able to stay instead of an expensive Plymouth marina. The disadvantage was that it was a few miles up the Tamar which was ebbing at 1.5 knots. Still, friendly sailing clubs are so often a delight to visit that I decided to head for Saltash. Pushing the tide all the way through 'The Bridge', a narrow channel inside Drake Island, past Cremyl, the Torpoint ferries and Devonport, I arrived at Saltash SC right under Brunel's Bridge. And so it turned out to be, a warm welcome, cup of tea, cheap beer, a warm shower and a berth on the pontoon.



My berth for the night - a great spot despite the sound of trains

Saltash to Plymouth, 16th April

OK it wasn't very far and I had wanted to get to Salcombe or at least Newton Ferris but the weather was against me today. I set out from the lovely friendly sailing club at Saltash with one reef in my sail and was soon racing down the Tamar past the naval dockyard, at nearly 6 knots with the strong northwesterly wind behind me. Time to put in a second reef, which I managed to do with some difficulty just past the Torpoint ferries.



Looking back to Saltash, and a nasty bit of weather. QAB marina – Sparrow may not be the biggest on the pontoons but is one of the prettiest

However I was still doing a very uncomfortable 5 knots and this was enough for me. There was no way I was going out of Plymouth sound in this weather so the sails came down just before Drake Island and I motored up to Queen Anne's Battery marina for a quiet but much more expensive night in shelter. All afternoon the wind was whistling though the rigging of all those tall masts. A walk around the city, bit of essential shopping, some excellent fish and chips then I finished the day by pulling some different ropes at the bellringing practice at St Andrews, hopeful of more progress the following day.

Plymouth to Dartmouth, 17th April

Much less wind noise from the marina masts but the clouds were moving fast and the forecast was mostly northwest 4 to 6. Going out today would break my rule of never sailing when there is a 6 in the forecast. Still it was all in the right direction and the land would shelter me so I put two reefs in and left before 0900. Outside the marina and underneath Plymouth Hoe I had removed two of the sail ties when there was a big gust of wind. Hmm, let's see how I go just on the jib. Turned out to be a good decision as I sped south-eastwards at up to 5 knots.



Looking south as I approach Bolt Head and below Start Point



Getting close to Salcombe I had a decision to make – take the good progress made with my trusty jib or carry on to Dartmouth. The tide would be with me all the way, Start Point should be quite friendly with the neap tides and the wind direction should mean I would keep the shelter of the land, so I decided to carry on. A bad decision.

I rounded Start Point in flat seas but the white waves in the distance looked ominous. The wind that was still blowing at force 5 or 6 had veered to the North so it was pretty much on the nose from Dartmouth and had kicked up a nasty short sea across Start Bay. I was in an uncomfortable situation with no choice but to rely on my engine to get me over the last 8 miles to Dartmouth. The wind kept up but the sea gradually flattened out as I closed the land and I was very relieved to chug into Dartmouth.



Coming into Dartmouth

Dartmouth is great. A busy harbour full of hundreds of yachts, ferries going to and fro and lots going on on the waterfronts on both sides of the river. Even a steam train whistling from the Dart Valley Railway. Plenty of places to eat and drink and quite lively even in April. There seemed to be lots of smartly dressed short haired young blokes walking around with their parents and sisters. Perhaps some event at the naval officer's college. I had a pub meal amongst more naval officers then another opportunistic bell ring and that was it for the night.

Dartmouth to Brixham, 18th April

A bright sunny morning in Dartmouth with the sound of a military band drifting down from the Naval college up the hill. Dartmouth was coming to life as a holiday town with shops and businesses cleaning up, decorating their fronts and putting out their tables for the first time. Just time for me to have a coffee with Damian who works at the smart marina next to where I was moored, do a bit of shopping and set sail at about midday.

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No wind for the first hour so I motored up the coast until the wind gradually filled in from the southeast and then the south as forecast. Once again I had guillemots and gannets for company. The gannets flying in small groups low over the water. By the time I rounded Berry Head there was a decent force 3 and I had a nice reach into Brixham.



Approaching Berry Head

I went straight to the town pontoon rather than the marina and was met by rafts of young children racing around the harbour as I tied up. Fish is everywhere in Brixham, from the busy fishing port with its quaysides and market, to the numerous cafes and chip shops that are such an important part of this tourist destination. I think I like Brixham better than Dartmouth – more down to earth. Strong winds were forecast for the following day so I would probably be staying.



On the town pontoon

Brixham to Exmouth, 20th April

The 19th April was a spare day in Brixham waiting for weather. I occupied myself with a walk to the spectacular Berry Head and passage planning for the next few days. Milly was joining me for this leg and I decided to meet her from the train in Paignton, having not been to that town before. The weather forecast had changed overnight from variable 3 to northeasterly 4 to 5 and it was still blowing hard as we prepared to leave the town pontoon. However, the wind soon dropped to almost nothing but the swell remained making our 13 mile passage to Exmouth an uncomfortable motor but the sun shined and it was good to have company.



Milly crewing with me for the Brixham to Exmouth leg

It was the first time I had come into Exmouth and we carefully followed the channel buoys past a beach filled with weekenders dressed up against the cold April wind. I wasn't especially looking forward to Exmouth marina but it was a very convenient stopover for one night to avoid going further up the estuary. As expected it was full of bright speedboats and fast ribs – only two other boats with masts in the whole place. What saved it for me was the extremely helpful harbourmaster who offered to come and raise the footbridge at 0600 the next morning to let me out. I think he had a soft spot for Shrimpers as he had once sailed one to Alderney!! The overnight charge was also remarkably cheap. Carolyn surprised me by coming up to meet us and we spent the evening with her sister Alison and husband Iain at their house in Exeter. It was great to have some home cooking

Exmouth to West Bay, 21st April



Early starts are always rewarding.

The harbourmaster arrived on his bike at six, opened the footbridge and I was out into the ebbing channel and admiring the sunrise. The first half hour was promising and I was doing 5 knots on a nice reach. Shame it only lasted 10 minutes because for most of the passage the wind was too close to my heading to sail. I tried a few times but had to rely on the engine to make progress. It was also difficult to get the sail up and down in the brisk wind that was gusting force 5 at times and a choppy sea – that was more than forecast. Despite the uncomfortable passage I made steady progress along this spectacular coast with contrasting cliffs of different types and colours of rock. It was good to see Seaton Bay, Golden Cap and Seatown from the other side of the shore.



Golden Cap and Seatown

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It is always a good feeling to come into a harbour after being out at sea sailing solo, and today's passage was not the easiest. West Bay, or Bridport, is a small fishing harbour that caters for commercial fishing as well as a lot of sport fishing. It's also a surprisingly busy holiday resort, full of every sort of eatery from doughnut stalls to pricy fish restaurants.



Approaching West Bay and below West Bay harbour



The visitor's pontoon is a bit small and affected by the swell coming into the harbour, but the harbourmaster was very helpful and cleared out his wet room of some accumulated junk so that I could have shower. Tomorrow looks good for rounding Portland Bill at getting to Weymouth so I went over my passage plan again.

West Bay to Weymouth, 22nd April

This leg of my journey includes Portland Bill, where tidal streams can reach 8 knots creating dangerous races and steep breaking waves. Getting around safely had occupied my thoughts a lot in the last few days. Timing is crucial. To get around the inside passage there is just a 2 hour window in every 12 hour tidal cycle. It is 17 miles from West Bay, the closest harbour to the west.

I left at 1130 which gave me four and a half hours to get to Chesil Cove from where I needed to hug the coast of the Isle Portland all the way round. The light drizzle started as I left the pontoon and continued all afternoon and evening but when you are out in the open with good clothing you don't really notice it. There was very little wind and the sea was sometimes glassy calm as I made my way along the whole length of Chesil Beach. Quite a few farms and houses with the odd caravan park – all with fantastic sea views. A single dolphin porpoised ahead of me but apart from that it was the usual guillemots and cormorants for company.

I had heard about strong adverse tides on this stretch that makes you late at Portland, but I recorded nothing more than 1 knot, so I dawdled for the last hour or two up to the first way point to avoid getting there early. There was still very little wind. The sea was a bit lumpy as I made my way around the spectacular Portland cliffs just a stone's throw away on my port side. Then it was just an hour or so to Weymouth.



The west side of Portland approaching Pulpit Rock

West Bay to Weymouth, 22nd April



Around Portland Bill, nice and calm

Approaching Weymouth harbour entrance the pilot gigs were once again out practicing, as they have been at every port I have visited. What a widespread sport this has become. The drizzle didn't stop and it was a slightly soggy Weymouth that greeted me at 1830. A bit different to the last time I came here in Sparrow when it was buzzing with holiday makers on a sunny June evening.



Weymouth harbour on a grey morning. Sparrow is there somewhere

Weymouth to Chapmans Pool, 23rd April

I left the harbour at 1400 and straight away was sailing on a lovely reach. Perfect conditions and great to be heading east under sail. I closed the coast so that I could admire the fantastic jurassic cliffs of this wonderful coastline. I hadn't properly read up on the military firing range off Lulworth and was approached by the guard boat that told me live firing was taking place and that I couldn't go any further than Lulworth. This wasn't too much of a problem. I went into Lulworth Cove and anchored for half an hour and then was able to continue to Chapmans Pool. What a hidden gem it is. A lovely anchorage sheltered from northerly winds in a setting of spectacular cliffs. I shared it overnight with two yachts and a dinghy with a boom cover.



Anchored in Lulworth Cove and approaching Chapman's Pool on the Jurassic Coast



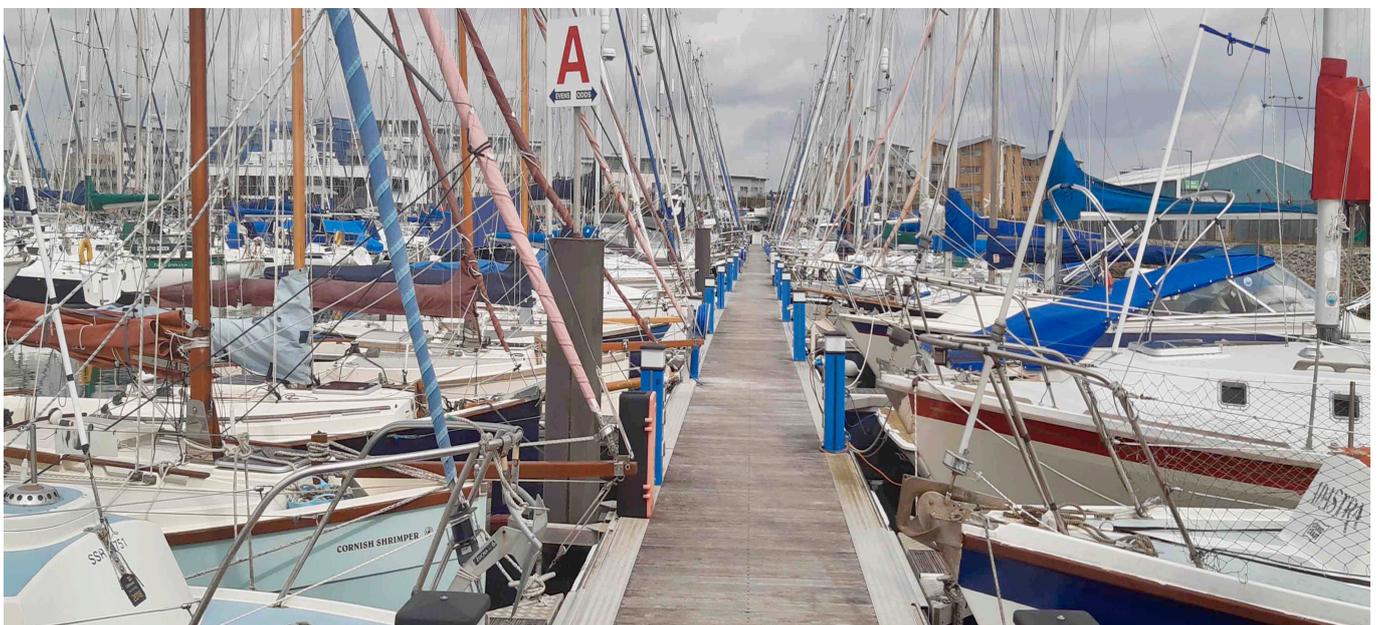
Chapman's Pool to Poole, 24th April

An uncomfortable night at anchor worrying a bit that my anchor wouldn't hold and that I might end up on the shore or hitting one of the other boats. As it turned out there was hardly any wind so thankfully the anchor wasn't really tested and I woke up in the same place that I went to sleep. Some serious rock and roll all night though and the sound of halyards flapping.

My plan was to leave at first light to get around St Albans Head on the inside passage by 0600 before the flood tide got too strong. Thinking that the other boats would be doing the same as me I was a bit concerned when there was no sign of life in any of them at 0500. Had I got this all wrong? Did these other boats know much more than me about the local conditions? I ignored these thoughts and stuck to my plan, rounding the headland less than 50 m from the rocks on a smooth but lumpy sea just before 0600. I could see the tide race a little further out, while I enjoyed a relatively calm passage.

A pleasant fine reach took me to Durlleston to which I gave a wide berth of about a mile. I was surprised to find tidal streams of up to 4 knots (in the right direction) until I was off the distinctive Old Harry Rocks. No overfalls and a mostly smooth sea with the characteristic glassy patches that leave you thinking that there is something sinister and mysterious going under the surface. I kept checking the echo sounder but there was always plenty of water. I had a close up view of a departing Brittany Ferry as I entered the harbour but then it was just follow the channel markers to Poole Yacht Club, where a marina berth was waiting for me. I was tied up by 0900 got a hot shower and found a comfortable lounge chair!

The Poole Yacht Club Haven



Poole to Lymington, 25th April

Another 0400 wake up and an early departure to make sure of getting past the Sandbanks ferry and out of the harbour before the tide turned. I followed the blinking channel buoys past the shapes of sleek motor boats and yachts bobbing at their moorings. It was a moonlit night and not difficult to find my way though this unfamiliar harbour.

Once through the East Looe Channel and clear of the harbour entrance it began to get light. It was a dead run to the start of the Needles Channel that would take me up to Hurst Castle and into the Solent. The gentle north westerly wind gradually increased and after a couple of hours I was doing 5 knots, happy that I had put a reef in before leaving Poole. As I approached The Needles everything ahead of me looked confusing. I could see breakers that I assumed to be over the Shingles Bank, and rough water everywhere. There didn't seem to be a way through. When I got closer things fell into place but the sea was rough and choppy and I felt vulnerable alone in a little boat. There were no big waves and once around the Shingles buoy I was making good speed on a square reach.



Looking back at The Needles

All the way up the Needles Channel the breaking seas over the Shingles Bank were just a couple of hundred metres away to port. There was no more than about 1 knot of tide with me most of the way but this gradually increased to 3 or 4 knots at Hurst Castle.

Passing through Hurst Narrows on a spring tide was a new experience for me. The sea got rougher and was swirling under me but the NW wind meant I had good boat speed and plenty of control. Suddenly I was through it and the water was calm and smooth. It was a strange feeling of relief and accomplishment.



Rough water off Hurst Castle Narrows

After that it was a straightforward passage into Lymington avoiding the yachts coming out to start their day's sailing and the Isle of Wight ferries. The weather for the next few days is either easterlies or too windy, so Sparrow will stay in Lymington and I'll stay with my brother Tom in Romsey. All being well, on Monday I shall be sailing to Chichester with Mark Jenkins in *Bluejay 1152*, where we will meet up with Gerry McGeehen in *Amigo 21/21* before continuing East in company.

Lymington to Gosport, 28th April

Down to the harbour for about 1030 where there were yachts and boats of all kinds getting ready for a Sunday on the water. The weather forecast was marginal for a Shrimper and there was a decision to make about whether to set off or not. I would be sailing in company for the first time with Mark, for whom this was the start of the trip. We decided to go, leaving just after 1100 and soon found that the two reefs we had both put in were not needed. The wind varied from about force 2 to 4 and was behind us all the way, and together with the tide was pushing us east at up to 6 knots. We had plenty of company with lots of racing yachts out from the different clubs and sailing centres around the Solent.



Mark Jenkins and the author about to leave Lymington

The grey drizzle when we left Lymington gradually changed to bright sunshine as we got close to Portsmouth so it was really a good day's sail. Good decision to sail today. There was plenty of water traffic on entering Portsmouth including ferries and all sorts of yachts. We were soon berthed in the marina in Gosport to be met by another Shrimper sailor and spent the evening talking about boats, weather and passages.

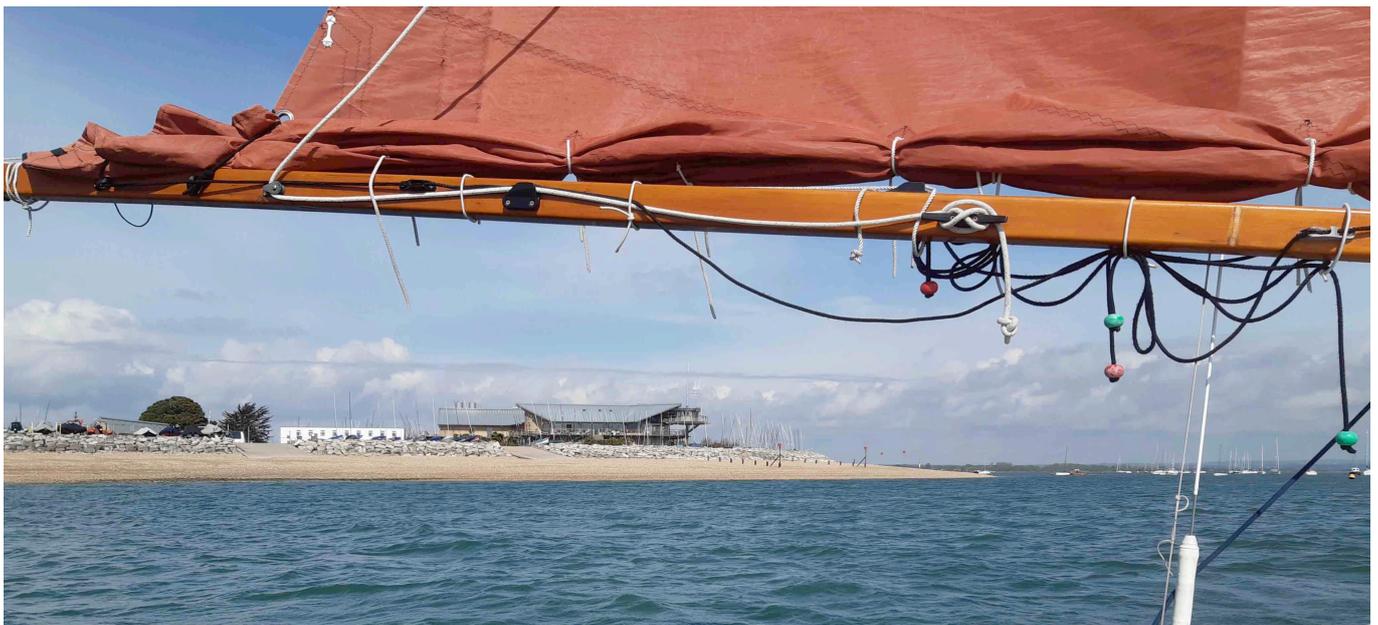
Entering Portsmouth Harbour



Gosport to Chichester Harbour, 29th April

Another early start to catch the east going tide and another decision to make during the passage – this time whether we go into Chichester Harbour or carry on to Littlehampton. We had plenty of navigational tips from our discussions the night before. There was a brisk southerly wind and with two reefs in we motored out of Portsmouth Harbour in bright sunshine avoiding the ferries.

A good day to be out on the water and we motor sailed for about an hour. The sea off Portsmouth is littered with forts, platforms and beacons built at different times in history to protect from invaders. One of these is the anti submarine barrier just east of the harbour entrance with a marked passage for small boats. The sea became rougher as we made our way east and the last mile to the entrance of Chichester Harbour was uncomfortable, but we made good progress with the favourable wind on our beam and ran down the channel into Chichester Harbour and slipped into Sparkes marina on Hayling Island.



Chichester Harbour with two reefs. Hayling Island SC on shore

My first visit here and the contrast with Portsmouth could not be greater. It's quiet, windswept and a little bleak but very beautiful. There is a sailing club, a marina and a large caravan park, and then flat, low lying land looking inland with the South Downs in the distance. With most of the day to kill and in bright sunshine we took a short cruise into the harbour, stopping at Itchenor for a beer and then up to Bosham, which looked idyllic from the water. A good decision to stop at Chichester.

Chichester Harbour, 30th April

There was a big decision to make in the morning: head around Selsey Bill for Littlehampton or perhaps Shoreham or spend the day in the shelter of Chichester Harbour. A walk out past the lifeboat station to look at the sea convinced us that we shouldn't go out of the harbour. There was a good force 4 blowing from the southeast that we would have to motor straight into for the first two hours. After this we might have stronger winds that would have built up bigger seas. With the decision made we had a pleasant sail in the shelter of the harbour making use of the blustery southerly wind when we could. Emsworth sailing club for lunch and the Ship Inn in Itchenor for a meal in the evening. The day wasn't without incident. I managed to run aground but got myself off with a combination of reverse gear and pushing with the paddle I keep aboard, and Mark rescued a kite surfer who had overestimated his abilities in an offshore wind. In Chichester Harbour we met up with Gerry McGheen *Amigo* (21/21), and from now on there would be three of us heading in company to Amsterdam.



Moored up at Emsworth and another Shrimper at Bosham



Chichester Harbour to Brighton, 1st May



Chart courtesy of Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson www.imray.com

The forecast for the 1st May had been light and variable winds for several days and despite a few days of unpredictable weather beforehand, that's what it turned out to be. So with the prospect of a day's motoring, we left the pontoon off Itchenor on a beautiful early morning heading into a light breeze. The Looe Channel off Selsey Bill, where there can be a tide race in strong winds and tides, was calm and peaceful and we rounded it at 1000 sailing in a light breeze.



Sparrow and Bluejay rounding The Mixon Post at Selsey Bill

We did try to sail from time to time but our engines were running for most of the day as we ticked off Bognor, Littlehampton, Worthing, Shoreham and finally Brighton. There wasn't much wildlife but a large bumblebee took a rest in my cockpit 2 miles off Bognor.

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By the time we got to Brighton the sunny morning was long gone. The clouds were building and there were a few spots of rain. I decided to sail close inshore so that I could have a good look at Brighton and the places that are familiar from many past visits. I passed close to the end of the Palace Pier and could hear the screams of people riding the big dipper. By 1600 we were tied up in Brighton Marina. Many thanks to friends Susan and Tim for a home cooked meal and giving me a comfy bed for the night.



Brighton seafront and the Palace Pier on a gloomy afternoon and tied up in the marina



Brighton to Eastbourne, 2nd May

It was a still and misty morning in Brighton with visibility of about half a mile and hardly a breath of wind. Not a good prospect for being offshore in a small sailing boat. We didn't need to get underway until late morning so it was a case of hoping the weather would change. This it gradually did and we left at 1120 with about 2 miles of visibility but still no wind, although the forecast was to pick up from the southwest to a force 4 by late afternoon.



Mist and no wind – Amigo on passage

An hour out of Brighton we crossed the Greenwich Meridian – another little indication of making progress eastwards. At Newhaven there was still not much wind but we all decided it was best to carry on. We could hardly see the magnificent chalk cliffs of the Seven Sisters and Beachy Head in the continuing gloom, which persisted all day. The wind did gradually pick up and was enough to let us cut our engines by the time we passed the Beachy Head lighthouse – barely visible just half a mile away in the mist. As so often happens around headlands there was a lumpy and uncomfortable swell off Beachy Head as we gybed to head in to Sovereign Harbour at Eastbourne. The wind continued to build from the southwest and for the last couple of miles we were doing 5 or 6 knots on a dead run. We were through the lock and tied up at Sovereign Harbour at 1600.



Eastbourne Pier in the gloom

Sovereign Harbour is an unusual place. The entirely man made marina is vast with many arms and dead ends. It's really a housing development with water. There must be hundreds of houses and flats, some with a sea view, others with private water frontage and others that could be on any housing estate in any town in the country. Some of the most expensive looking are right next to where the many fishing boats moor up, offload their catches and store their gear.



Three Shrimpers in Sovereign Harbour and a true blue fishing boat

Another day of little wind is forecast tomorrow and we plan to cover the 40 odd miles to Dover. We would have liked to call at Rye but their yacht moorings are closed at the moment, so it looks like another day of motoring to cover the miles.

Eastbourne to Dover, 4th May

We left Eastbourne in the dark and then a 5 hour motor to Dungeness where we had a fine view of the little shacks that line the shore with the monstrous power station behind.



Leaving Sovereign Harbour at 0430 Sailing past Dungeness



The wind picked up at Dungeness and we enjoyed a couple of hours of gentle sailing eastwards towards Dover, but the last two hours of the 40 mile day were motoring again. We were in the big new marina at Dover by 1400. Lots of locked gates and buttons to press to get anywhere but the staff were very friendly and even wanted a picture of us in front of our boats. We spent the evening being entertained in the very friendly local yacht club who had laid on a free barbecue for some visiting yachtsmen from France. Great to speak to some local characters and get valuable information for tomorrow's passage to Calais.

Dover to Calais, 5th May

A journey that most of us have done many times while wandering decks of a ferry having a coffee looking out at the sea was a different prospect in a 19 foot Shrimper, but something that all three of us wanted to do. This was to be an important part of the whole trip.

Across Dover Harbour



It was another early start but not before dawn. We chugged across the wide Dover Harbour and out of the western entrance onto a flat calm sea with barely a breath of wind. It was going to be another motoring day but not as long as yesterday, and the prospect of being in France made it a bit special. There was very little to see as the white cliffs gradually faded into the haze and the hilly French coast came into view. There was the Varne light vessel (or its modern equivalent) and plenty of ships as we crossed the sea lanes but no close encounters.



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The ferries kept up their busy shuttling to the east of us. The safety warnings coming through on the radio told us to look out for small boats, as it was perfect conditions for making such a crossing today, but we saw nothing. As we got near to France the wind gradually picked up and we were able to sail the last bit up to Calais for 2 hours before we entered the harbour. A short wait on a buoy for the road bridge to open and we were into the marina, which was a big contrast to Dover or Brighton. No one to contact to tell us where to moor or to pay so we just tied up where it said 'visiteurs'. A very kind local sailor who we had met in Dover the night before took us the couple of miles to the immigration police at the ferry port, where we got our passports stamped in about 5 minutes. We were then treated to a driving tour of Calais, taking in the Hotel de Ville. We finished the day by celebrating with a good meal.



The approach to Calais, the Hotel de Ville and our evening meal



Calais to Dunkerque, 6th May

After a nice breakfast at the great Boulangerie near to the marina we left the very casual and laid back Calais Marina when the road bridge opened at 1100.



The visitor's berths at Calais Marina – Sparrow is the smallest boat

The port was free of ferry movements so we were straight out and heading north over the Ridens de la Rade sand bank, avoiding the ferries. The weather forecast was grim: light northerly winds and rain and that's how it turned out. It was the first really rainy day of the trip for me but yachting waterproofs are pretty good and I mostly stayed dry.

It was mostly a day of motoring, although I had the sails up for a while trying to sail. Eventually the wind went right round to the southwest and we were able to sail the last hour up to Dunkerque.

The coastline between Calais and Dunkerque is very industrial with nuclear power stations, the big commercial and ferry port at Dunkerque West and steelworks further east. This is all west of the town where we would eventually enter the harbour.

We followed a big Chinese ore carrier being shepherded by tugs into the east port, passed the impressive lighthouse and made our way down towards the yacht club marina which is within walking distance of the town centre.

Dunkerque to Nieuwpoort, 7th May

A much better forecast for today but it started grey and misty as we made our long way out of the harbour into the cold, grey green North Sea. There was more west in the wind than expected which meant we could sail nearly all day. The first part of the passage was just off the famous Dunkerque beaches, that have been built up with hotels and apartment blocks, in great contrast to the industrial coast that we passed yesterday.

It was a slightly complicated passage because we had to keep to the channels in between the sand banks. No big ships today but lots of yachts enjoying the nice wind and the sunshine. The coastline was very built up most of the time with apartment blocks. We were now in Belgium waters and it seems that the Belgians are making the most of their short coastline for holidaying.



Approaching Nieuwpoort

Once inside Nieuwpoort Harbour there was a long straight approach to the marinas and the town. The marinas were full of big new looking yachts so it must be a big yachting centre. We had very convenient berths at the Yacht Club, although I don't think it is a club as we know it – more a marina that just calls itself a club. Bit of a bargain for us though at less than half the price of many UK marinas.



Our berths at Nieuwpoort

The town of Nieuwpoort was a short walk away. The old streets of Flemish brick houses had been beautifully restored and led us to a lovely old square where we sat in the sunshine enjoying a beer and listening to the carillon sounding from the church tower.



Nieuwpoort Town Square

Nieuwpoort to Cadzand, 8th May

The weather forecast was northerly 3 to 4 which meant we should be able to sail. This is exactly what we got with a very consistent wind all day – never getting too strong and never dying away but there was no shelter so the sea became quite choppy. Because weather forecasts are so detailed there is a temptation to take them literally to the minute, and then wonder why the wind was half an hour late picking up. Actually I think that in general, marine weather forecasts are very reliable for at least a couple of days ahead.

So we left our moorings in Nieuwpoort at 1030 to the sound of machine gun fire from the firing range next to the harbour. As soon as we cleared the pierheads we were called up on the radio and told to turn west immediately as we had strayed into the range. We didn't realise it extended out to sea, but should have checked of course. We were then intercepted by a fast rib and told to head 4.5 miles out to sea. This was bad news as it was right into the wind and would add an hour or more to our passage time. The Belgian authorities were quite persistent and sent a spotter plane that circled over us, presumably to make sure we complied. What was most frustrating was that by the time we were 4.5 miles offshore it was 1230 and they stop firing. So then we could start heading northeast at last. It was a straightforward course past the ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge and an almost continuously built up coastline away to our right. Today's wind would give us the opportunity to cover 30 miles or so sailing, but it was a hard day's sail close reaching with a continuous wind and a choppy sea. We had picked out the small harbour of Cadzand between Zeebrugge and Breskens as our end point. Cadzand is just in Holland so this would give us three different countries in two days! *Shrimper on the horizon – a typical sight that day in the North Sea*



As we approached the harbour I had a problem with my engine control. I couldn't push the neutral button in and the main lever was slipping. This meant I didn't have full power. Anyway I managed to get in OK with Gerry standing by in case I needed a tow.



Approaching Cadzand on a fine reach

Cadzand is a newly build beach resort with a smart marina and lots of hotels and apartment blocks. There were lots of Dutch people walking on the beach well dressed up against the cold wind off the North Sea. We were getting used to people admiring our three Shrimpers – well, they were nearly always the most attractive boats in the msrina – and since we crossed the channel and our red ensigns stood out we were often asked if we had sailed here from the UK.

Cadzand to Middelburg, 9th May

With the easterly tide getting a little later each day we didn't need to set off until about 1200. This gave me time to look at my engine control which just needed cleaning, greasing and tightening up to get it working properly. I'm hoping that if I handle it carefully it will at least last until I'm back home.

It is a public holiday in The Netherlands and once out of the harbour we motor sailed for several miles past beaches busy with walkers, and cyclists in the dunes behind them. The wind was lighter than yesterday but until the sun came through there was still that North Sea chill in the air.

Our next obstacle was the Westerschelde shipping channel that leads to the port of Antwerp. It's a busy stretch of water where ships and ferries have right of way over yachts and there are strict rules about where it can be crossed. There was a flood tide of 2 or 3 knots and a large ship on its way in, but as well behaved yachtsmen, crossed at the correct place and waited to go astern of the ship.



Well behaved Shrimpers in the Westerschelde avoiding a big ship

Then it was into our first lock, that we shared with two police boats and a few yachts, and that lowered us 2 feet below the level of the sea. Suddenly we were out of the North Sea and in the Middelburg canal and the sun was shining brightly. We had an hour and a half wait for the first bridge, either because we got the timing wrong or the ship made us late, but were lucky to find a local sailor who passed on some valuable information about the waters we would pass through over the coming days.

Our first bridge



It felt great to be in a Dutch canal at last. Instead of looking at the sea and the distant shore we could watch every aspect of humanity pass by – houses, businesses, gardens, parks, people walking their dogs, cyclists and much more. We found ourselves in a convoy of about 10 yachts heading up the canal waiting at each bridge for it to open, before ending up in the picturesque centre of Middelburg where we tied up for the night.



Middelburg in the evening sun. Spot the Shrimpers

Middelburg to Veere, 10th May

Middelburg was just as bright and sunny this morning as it was last night. Summer seems to have come at last on this holiday weekend. The streets were busy as I did a bit of food shopping and then left on my own at lunchtime. As I reached the main canal a short way from the town a huge Swiss river cruise ship came into view. I had no idea such vessels existed but was to see several more later in the day.

River cruise ship on the canal



Middelburg to Veere, 10th May

The 3.5 miles to Veere was pleasantly rural with cows grazing on the banks and views of the church and townhall buildings at Veere in the distance. I passed through the lock without difficulty and was out into the Veerse Meer, which was full of sailing boats enjoying the nice northerly breeze and the sunshine. I felt compelled to join them and hoisted my sails for a very pleasant hour or so criss crossing the waterway. I spotted another Shrimper and assumed it was Gerry who had left Middleburg before me, but it was a local boat 918 who shouted something about how good Shrimpers were as we passed.



In the Veerse Meer, thanks to Gerry for the photograph and mooring at Veere

I was surprised how busy the water was. There were holiday houses on the banks, lots of jetties and a large marina containing sailing boats of every size. Eventually I met up with Gerry and we made for the old harbour in the middle of the small town. Veere is a picture postcard tourist spot and very beautiful for all that. It is all that I could have imagined for an overnight stay in The Netherlands.

Just one more thing, the town hall tower behind has a slightly musical carillon that plays every half hour before chiming the hours.

Veere to Zierikzee, 11th May

Our progress has been better than expected and there is now no need to take every opportunity to head east. We have plenty of time to get to Amsterdam, leave our boats, travel home for a week or so before returning (Gerry and I with cars and trailers) to take part in International Shrimper Week at the beginning of June. The weather forecast is easterlies for Saturday and Sunday so we are going to visit some more recommended places closeby until there are more favourable winds for heading east.

Leaving Verre just before 0900 we had a very pleasant motor along the Veeres Meer. Although it's a man-made lake, formed by damming one of the mouths of the Rhine, it felt like an uspoilt wilderness. I guess it is made for holidays and watersports, especially sailing. Development is restricted to certain well defined areas leaving most of it quiet and green. We passed what looked like a scout camp, then a housing development but attractive and carefully designed.



Motoring through the Veeres Meer

It took nearly 2 hours to reach the lock that would lower us once again and send us out into the Oosterschelde. There were over 20 boats in the large lock. Most people know what to do so it goes mostly quite smoothly, but the guy on the boat next to us had to cut his bow line because he hadn't noticed it getting taught as the level dropped, and couldn't release it from the cleat. Bit of a lesson for us there. The Oosterschelde was full of boats enjoying the warm sunshine of the holiday weekend. We headed north on a fine reach, under the Zeelandbrug motorway bridge and up to the straight channel that leads to Zierikzee.



The Zeelandbrug

With a steady breeze and flat water it was one of the best sails of the trip. Zierikzee is another lovely town that probably depends on tourism. 40 and 50 foot Yachts were rafted 5 deep along the quay. There was a great holiday atmosphere and a saxophone band gave a free concert from an old barge that went past the moored boats, through two bridges and into the middle of the town. Moored on the waterfront there were lots of passers-by, many of whom asked us if we had sailed here from Britain, took an interest in our trip or asked about our boats. I suppose we stood out amongst the big white yachts as being the smallest boats around as well as the only ones flying red ensigns.



The saxophone band passing through the Zierikzee

Zierikzee to Sint Annaland, 12th May

I was woken up by the local carillon, tempered by the pleasant sound of birdsong in the background. Later in the morning we heard a cookoo. After almost a month this was my first really warm day when I could sail in shorts and no need for a sailing jacket. One by one the big yachts let go their moorings and made their way down the cut. We were one of the last to leave around midday heading east into the wind but with plenty of time to tack down the wide channel.

There were lots of yachts out, most were probably returning home after the long holiday weekend. We shall see if the waterways are less busy tomorrow. The interest in our boats and our voyage continues. One lady even shouted to me from a passing yacht to ask if I had sailed from Britain and gave a whoop when I said yes. We encountered our first barges today. They are difficult to see as some are very low in the water but they move fast and can easily surprise you. We will need to keep a sharp lookout for them in the next few days, regularly checking up and down the channel. The tel-tail sign when they're coming towards you is the foaming bow wave.

It was a great day for a sail. The wind was gusting up to 4 or 5 at times but nowhere was the fetch long enough to build up any waves to speak of, so we had the flat water that Shrimpers like best. Gerry and I stopped at Sint Annaland, a newish marina development close to a pleasant little town that was very quiet. We had been told that this area is known to be very religious and being Sunday just after Ascension Day most shops and restaurants would be closed.



Amigo and Sparrow in the marina just after a rainstorm

Sint Annaland to Willemstad, 13th May

A light southerly wind meant we could sail for almost the whole day, out into the Mastgat Zijpe and up to Krammersluizen, the first of today's two locks. This took us into the Volkerak which is apparently fresh water. We dawdled along here in the company of 3 or 4 other yachts that we had shared the lock with. The wind varied from almost nothing to force 3 but we all kept sailing and the Shrimpers kept up with the bigger yachts and even overtook them at times. The Volkerak is another lovely stretch of water and we took a narrow, shallow channel around an island, keeping away from the main channel used by the barges (see below).



After a slow 10 miles sailing in the hot sun we came to Volkeraksluizen, our second lock of the day, which we shared with almost the same yachts as the first. Then it was a short motor into the picturesque little town of Willemstad where we moored in the town marina. Willemstad is built almost entirely within an ancient star shaped fortification – one of eleven fortified towns in the area dating from the sixteen hundreds apparently. It was quiet and peaceful as we walked around in the evening but is a popular tourist destination as are many of the places we have visited in this part of The Netherlands.

Willemstad to Dordrecht, 14th May

I had been just over a month away sailing my Shrimper, living in a small cabin and sailing single handed most of the day. It's beginning to feel like hard work but Amsterdam is not far away and I have booked a flight home for the 21st May. We spent the morning in Willemstad looking around this pretty town, and came across a family of swans holding people up outside the supermarket.



Moorings in Willemstad – well everyone has to pose in front of a windmill in Holland!

There was a strong south wind blowing across the Hollandsch Diep. It had just too much east in it for us to sail for the first half hour, but when our course became a bit more northerly we tentatively unrolled our jibs. About half way was plenty as the wind screamed across us. We both got a bit wet from the spray that flew up from the chop but we soon dried in the hot sun.

Our passage took us north of a small island just off a big oil refinery and industrial area. The opposite bank to the north looked like largely unspoilt farmland. After about 6 miles heading east on the Hollandsch Diep we turned left up the Dordtsche Kil, a tidal channel that runs up to Dordrecht. With the wind behind us and the tide helping, we ran under just our jibs past willows that reminded me of the Norfolk Broads, open fields and small docks until the outskirts of Dordrecht appeared. The road and rail bridges are spectacular but no need to wait for them to open as our masts passed comfortably under the fixed spans.



Sparrow is dwarfed by the mighty Dordrecht bridges

There was a short wait for the bridge into the yacht haven marina to open, and soon we were berthed right in the centre of town a stone's throw from the famous church with its massive tower.

It was a day of hot sun and plenty of wind and we made good progress. It was good that we got some sailing in because for the next few days we are going to be in much narrower rivers and canals. It will be a bit different and I'm looking forward to it. As I finish off today's entry I can hear Dordrecht church clock striking 10.



Dordrecht

Dordrecht to Gouda, 15th May

Another town another Carrillion, but Dordrecht boasts the biggest one in Europe with 67 bells. We had the morning free so after some time spent in the very friendly tourist office trying to get some reliable information about our transit through Amsterdam, we visited the Grote Kirk. The highlight was climbing the 275 steps to the top of the tower, stopping the belfry on the way up where we saw the “English” ring of 10 bells as well as the carillion bells, the heaviest of which weighs 10 tonnes.

Dordrecht to Gouda, 15th May



Looking east from the top of the Grote Kerk. Our Shrimpers are somewhere in that marina



Leaving the marina in Dordrecht

Back to sailing, and in order to leave the marina we needed to coordinate the lifting of a footbridge and a roadbridge. We left just as the drizzle started and it was to continue all afternoon and evening, gradually getting heavier. Still, when you have good waterproofs you get used to it and don't notice it after while. There was tide against us for the first mile or so heading east, but when we turned north we came under the influence of the Rhine proper, that flows out to sea at the Hook of Holland, and we had up to 2 knots of tide with us.

St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

As we left the outskirts of Dordrecht and skirted around Rotterdam, the banks of the wide channel were mostly taken up with shipyards and light industry. There were residential areas too, often small developments right next to the shipyards and the wharves. River frontage must mean a lot to Dutch people. Our route took us close to the middle Rotterdam before turning right up the Hollandse IJssel, a narrower and less busy waterway that leads up to Gouda.



As close as we got to Rotterdam

We had planned reach the first lifting bridge before it closed for three hours at 1530 but mistimed it and got there late. However, from the height gauge it looked like I would get under it OK, but that Gerry, who needs about an extra metre, might not. Unperturbed, Gerry went for it while I watched from behind and I think he was less than a foot away from losing his VHF aerial.

On we went, motoring in the rain with no wind to speak of. The wharves and shipyards gave way to more waterside houses, many of which had speedboats at the ends of their gardens hoisted up on steel frames that slanted into the water. We passed a few towns and villages but disappointingly they didn't seem to have places to moor up if we had wanted to stop for a coffee or some lunch.

Approaching Gouda there was a lock and two lifting bridges and we were soon tied up in the very cosy and friendly local sailing club. Reunited with Mark, there was time for a beer, but the trip into town would have to wait until the morning when it might just have stopped raining.

Gouda to Braassemmermeer, 16th May

Well it didn't stop raining overnight and was still raining in the morning while we walked into Gouda and saw the cheese Market.



Anyone for cheese?

The rain continued for the first couple of hours of motoring on towards Amsterdam. We left the very friendly local sailing club in time to pass under the nearby railway bridge that lifted at 1027 for just 4 minutes. There was some doubt about our progress through the 11 lifting bridges we planned to pass today. Information about the lifting times was in the guide book for the standing mast route and could also be obtained from telephone help lines. Many people we had met, including harbour masters and yachtsmen with first hand experience, also offered advice. The trouble was that it was all different. After some discussion, when Gerry and I even considered lowering our masts before we left Gouda, we decided to leave our masts up, stick together and hope for the best. This was a good decision and we found ourselves in a 'convoy' that included a slow moving barge and a yacht with a very tall mast. All the bridges lifted for us with very short or no waiting times. In one case the traffic on a motorway was stopped and queuing for some distance as the last two Shrimpers passed through.



We passed through lots of bridges like this And these in Alphen aan den Rijn

The river banks gradually became less rural and more built up, mostly with tidy looking houses and neat gardens running down to the water. Alphen aan den Rijn was the biggest town we passed through where lots of riverside houses had outdoor terraces right on the waters edge, many of which were quite narrow and without any railing. We stopped for coffee after the last bridge of the day, before sailing into the Braassemmeer, a wide open stretch of water where I took the opportunity to reach across it and back in the nice southwesterly breeze that had sprung up. The night stop was another friendly sailing club.

Braassemmeer to Amsterdam, 17th May

Yes a big day today with our destination in touching distance but more sailing to come before the end of this log. It started today with a nice sail across the Braassemmeer in the northerly breeze. We had this beautiful stretch of water, that is about 3 km across, almost to ourselves. It seems to be deep enough to sail anywhere and must be ideal for sailing races. After about another mile there was a T junction where we turned right for Amsterdam. In the next few miles we passed a maze of small dykes with countless waterside houses. Many were on islands to the right of the main river and there was also a larger lake named Westeinderplassen, some which may have been a nature reserve.

St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

We were getting close to Schipol Airport and besides the noise of planes the bank on the left began to be populated by those large buildings you get around major airports. On our right the waterside houses continued, and it was noticeable that those right under the flightpath were less expensive looking than some we had seen elsewhere. I even noticed a Kurdish flag so perhaps there are immigrant communities living there.



Our route to Amsterdam skirted around Schipol Airport

After 3 hours we reached the bridge that we knew would not open because of construction work, so it was time to lower our masts which took us about 45 minutes. While we were waiting a sailing boat about the same size as a Shrimper tried unsuccessfully to get through the closed bridge with the mast up and got stuck. They managed to extricate themselves and headed back the way they had come. Another larger yacht arrived, crewed this time by people who looked like they knew what they were doing, but they were not pleased when Gerry explained that the bridge would not open until sometime next year. They too headed back where they had come from.



Masts down and ready to go

Before heading off with the masts down we made one last attempt by phone to ask if we could pass through Amsterdam on the night convoy with our masts up. This time the answer was pretty clear that because we were able to lower our masts, there would be no night convoy for us. We would have to pass through Amsterdam with our masts down and under the bridges.

The first bridges in Amsterdam were the motorway ring road and the main railway line. Both were of course really busy with trains and trucks thundering over us as we passed underneath. This was followed by a lock and then a stretch of river where there were dozens of houseboats that ranged from very chic to very scruffy, all against a backdrop of city skyscrapers.

St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

I lost count of the number of bridges we passed under. Some were old and some were new, some had tramlines over them and they all carried bicycles and pedestrians across the water. They all had a clearance of about 2 to 2.5 metres which was plenty for both Amigo and Sparrow.



A main railway bridge coming up

I think that the waterway we were on is called the Kostverlorenvaart, but not sure whether it's a river or a canal. It deposited us on the Het IJ, the main waterway that links Amsterdam to the sea. This was busy with ferries and barges, and there was a cruise ship moored a little way up the river. We had a short motor up and across the river to the Sixhaven marina, which was welcoming and surprisingly low key since it was the closest to the city centre.



So I am here in Amsterdam almost exactly 5 weeks after leaving St Just creek near Falmouth, and my through the water log says 555.1 miles. I won't be finishing the log yet as we have some sailing to do in the Markermeer and the IJsselmeer in the coming weeks.

Around Amsterdam, 18th May

Another holiday weekend in The Netherlands and the sunny weather meant that lots of people were out in their boats. There was hardly any wind as we left Sixhaven marina opposite the central station and headed up the river, following the well marked channel and the recommended crossing points for yachts. We were soon through the lock, where we didn't detect any change in the water level, and into the Markermeer.

Into the Markermeer



St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

We were in no hurry and persisted with sailing in the very fickle and light winds. The Markermeer soon broadened out into a wide lake. Around the edge were groups of tower blocks, villages, smart housing developments, construction sites and the odd patch of countryside and woodland. We sailed around an island called Pampus. We didn't land but continued on under a railway bridge into the Gooimeer and to another island off Naarden, called De Schelp, that had an anchorage and moorings. It looked like somewhere very quiet to get away from it all, but on this holiday weekend it had attracted all sorts. There were elderly couples on their sailing boats, sunbathers on big shiny motor yachts, children zipping about in inflatable dinghies, jet skiers and a speedboat playing loud techno music. Two beautiful old wooden sailing boats came in and we were invited aboard to have a look round. They were built as fishing boats for the Zuider Zee and had been lovingly restored. We were told where they came from, a town a couple of hours up the river called Spakenburg, so we decided to go there.



One of the Spakenburg fishing boats and moorings on De Dode Hond Island

It was about 1600 when we left De Schelp, and for a couple of hours we made good progress sailing in the evening breeze. The breeze died and then a squall threatened so as we were still 3 miles from Spakenburg we stopped at a small island called De Dode Hond for some relative shelter. We decided to brave the mosquitos and stay the night.

Around Amsterdam, 19th May

The mosquitos were up before us, so after a quick breakfast we left the island of De Dode Hond at 0800 and made for Spakenburg. This is a gem of a town. The old harbour housed dozens of the traditional fishing boats that we had seen yesterday, as well as a shipyard where presumably they were built and is now devoted to restoration work.



The old harbour at Spakenburg

It was early on Sunday so all the nice looking cafés and restaurants were shut. After a quick look around the town it was time for me to make my way back down the Gooimeer leaving Gerry in Spakenburg. There was a light northerly breeze that enabled me to sail for several miles making just a couple of tacks.

St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

The channel was narrow to start with and I had to play the wind shifts to keep inside the numerous buoys. I had the company of one of the Spakenburg fishing boats for nearly all the way.

As I approached the bridge that marks the end of the Gooimeer the wind increased. Not wanting to tack through the bridge I dropped the sails and motored. Once through the bridge the wind had increased to a force 4 gusting 5 blowing straight down the Markameer and the water was becoming a bit rough. There was a sheltered channel inside some islands that I was able to take to the entrance to Miuden. A couple of miles up the river and through a lock and four bridges was the yacht haven where we had arranged to leave our boats. The last of the bridges is a traditional dutch type mainly built for pedestrians and bicycles.

There was a 1.5 hour wait because the bridge keeper has three bridges to look after and apparently takes long lunch breaks. My wait was in the middle of Weesp, another lovely dutch town where children were jumping into the river in a specially buoyed off area

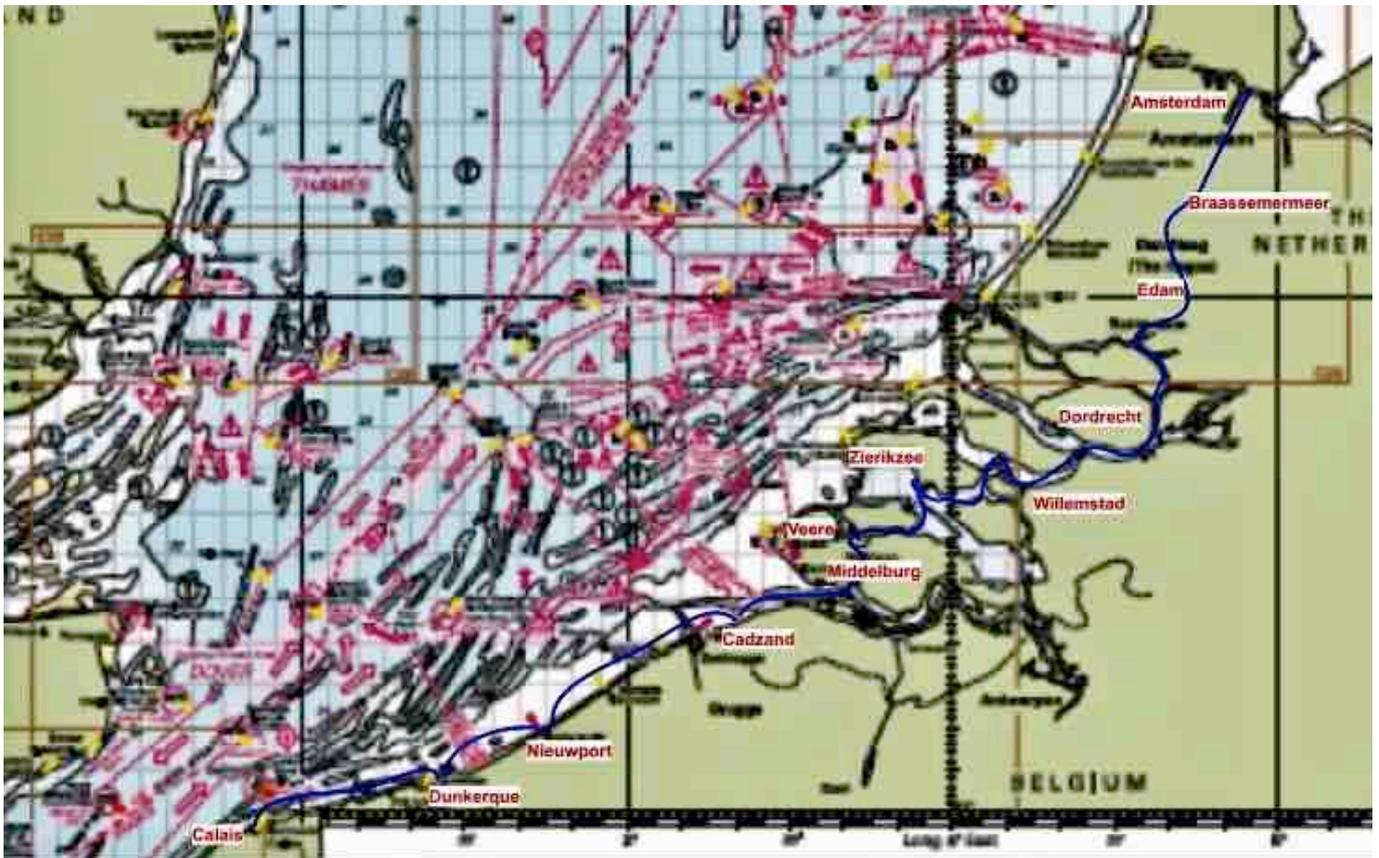


Waiting for the Bridge at Weesp

This will be my last log entry for a couple of weeks while I return home for a break from Shrimpering. I plan to pick it up again for the International Shrimper Week that starts on the 5th June.

St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

Our route from Calais to Amsterdam



*Chart courtesy of Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson www.imray.com
Drone photograph courtesy of passing yacht*



St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

ISW Holland 2024



ISW day 1, 6th June

It's the end of day 1 of ISW 2024 and three days since we left home to come back to Sparrow. The first of those three days began with a breakdown even before we reached the A30. Well done to the AA for replacing an injector at the roadside and getting us moving again. The rest of the journey towing an empty trailer was OK and we made the 400 miles to the ferry at Harwich with time to spare. The next day went to plan, driving the 80 odd miles from Hoek van Holland to Naarden where we left the boat trailer. There followed some complex logistics to take stuff to the boat at Weesp, about 12 km away, and then end up with the car at Naarden and ourselves at the boat, but with Jan's help we managed it and had time for a walk around the pleasant town of Weesp and a visit to the fantastic ice cream shop before leaving for Muiden.

At last we were underway on Sparrow again, chugging down the river, that for us was reminiscent of the Norfolk Broads, through the bridges and onto the marina at the KNZ and RV (Royal) yacht club. While waiting for the bridges we spoke to two octogenarian sailors who seemed to have sailed everywhere in Europe, and who made sure that we got through the bridges. Many thanks to them. We met up again later in the evening in the restaurant we chanced into when they told us that it was the best in town. Muiden is another very pleasant Dutch town with cafés, restaurants, a bakery and a waterway that goes right through the middle. The traditional sailing barges moored in the middle of towns and the boatyards complete the picture.



Shrimpers at the KNZ and RV Yacht Club in Muiden

St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

We had a breezy sail out of Muiden to Pampus Island a couple of miles away. Here we landed, had a stroll around the old fort, learned about the low impact energy systems installed on the island and had a coffee. The wind kept up and we had a good sail to the north of Pampus and back to Muiden.



Moored up at Pampus Island

Another short walk around town, a glance at the castle (but too late to go in) and it was time for the welcome dinner at the Yacht Club. This was a really good evening with great food and great company to start the week that promises lots of great sailing.



ISW Welcome Dinner at the KNZVR Yacht Club, Muiden

ISW Day 2, 7th June, Muiden to Amsterdam

There was everything to like about Muiden, whether it was the picturesque streets of the old town, the big old sailing boats tied up along the river, the cosy marina at the Royal Yacht Club where the Queen's boat was moored or the restaurants, bars and bakery. It was a great place to start the Shrimper Rally and a little sad to be leaving.

The day started with a westerly breeze and some sunshine and we had a nice sail away from Muiden towards Amsterdam where, although the sky looked threatening, the rain held off. Rather than tack up to the road bridge (the local name is the Shellingwouderbrug), and risk dodging the barges in the narrow and twisting channel, we downed the sails and motored up to the lock. For the three of us who had sailed from Britain this was retracing our steps to the Sixhaven marina back in the middle of the city.



With afternoon free, the sun shining and the whole city to explore everyone had different plans. For us it was visiting an old friend then a long walk back through Amsterdam that took in parks full of mostly young people celebrating the end of the working week, canals, quiet residential streets and busy tourist areas.

ISW Day 3, 8th June, Amsterdam to Edam

The plan for today was a 15 mile run up the west coast of the Markermeer to Edam. The forecast was for more wind and less sun than yesterday. With the prospect of 20 to 25 knots of wind later in the day most boats left the marina with at least one reef in. Once through the lock the light wind persuaded several Shrimpers to shake out their reefs, but the wind gradually picked up and we all enjoyed a lively run for several miles up the coast. The wind continued to increase and before long we had the 20 to 25 knots promised. This was all very well on a dead run but once around the lovely old lighthouse at Marken it was a tight fetch up to the harbour entrance at Edam and most boats arrived with two reefs in. The harbour at Edam has an impossibly narrow entrance but is very picturesque and we were soon all comfortably tied up along the riverbank. The lovely Dutch town was a short walk away and as well as the expected Edam cheese market shop.



The narrow harbour entrance at Edam and tied up along the riverbank



ISW Day 4, 9th June, Edam to Hoorn

With more strong westerly winds forecast the voyage across to the east side of the Markermeer was cancelled, in favour of continuing up the west coast for 8 miles to the town of Hoorn. This was a close reach in 20 knots or so wind so we were there in less than 2 hours. Although we were just a mile or two from the windward shore the wind had built up a bit of a chop in the shallow water.



A breezy sail from Edam to Hoorn and Sparrow coming into Hoorn



The weed that we had all been warned about was clear to see just below the surface for most of the way. This grows at this time of year and is a serious hazard throughout the Markermeer except in the deep water channels. We had been told to avoid using our engines wherever we see it, as it gets wrapped around the propellers and often needs to be cleared by hand. Best to keep sailing then!

Later when we were tied up in Hoorn there were odd bits attached to the front of our boat and around the rudder fittings. Coming into Hoorn was a little exciting as the wind was blowing hard across the harbour entrance with breaking waves around us. Once inside, the busy harbour was calm and delightful and we were able to tie up right in the centre of yet another very pretty waterside town.

ISW Day 5, 10th June, Hoorn to Enkhuizen

There are two types of readers of this log, Shrimper sailors and non Shrimper sailors. For those non Shrimper sailors, and especially those who are not any kind of sailor at all, here are a few explanations about what is going on this week with those who sail Shrimpers. There is an active and well supported owners association for this versatile and much loved little sailing boat. Of the well over a thousand that have been built, most are in Britain but there are smaller groups in other countries including France and The Netherlands. Every year a rally is organised when some of the more enthusiastic owners get together to cruise around and socialise for a week or so. It is called International Shrimper Week or ISW, and this year it's in the The Netherlands.

There was much attention paid to the many weather forecast apps this morning, because for a couple of days strong northwest winds had been predicted later in the day. We had woken up to a brisk southeasterly with the prospect of a 12 mile passage north to Enkhuizen in steady rain. It was decided to leave promptly to make sure we all got there well before the strong winds arrived.





Morning briefing in the rain

The first part of the passage was a close hauled fetch to get around a low headland called De Nek. The southeasterly wind had built up a steep chop and it was an uncomfortable sail with a lea shore on our left. Those who chose not to be helped by their engines were regularly stopped by the larger waves and knocked off the wind. Once around De Nek we could gradually bear away, although the wind and the beam sea continued to build, making for a swift but uncomfortable passage to Enkhuizen and the locks that would take us from the Markermeer to the IJsselmeer. Several tall ships came towards us as we approached, hoisting their sails as they cleared the harbour. The rain was unrelenting.



Through the lock at Enkhuizen and out into the IJsselmeer

Despite the different approaches, some using their engines and some not, some sailing close to the wind and some sailing free-er and putting in a tack to get round De Nek, we were all in the same lock and tied up at Compagnieshaven by midday. Once again the weather forecast was correct. The wind rose to a good 30 knots and the rain fell all afternoon and evening. There were reports of 60 knot winds in Rotterdam with trees uprooted. It was an evening for battening down the hatches or taking refuge in the nearest cafe or bar.



Hanging out the washing at Compagnieshaven

ISW Day 6, 11th June, Enkhuizen

A day off sailing and a mainly dry morning with a little sunshine that allowed us to dry out from the rain of the day before. The main thing today was the opportunity to visit the amazing Zuiderzee Open Air Museum that turned out to be one of the highlights of the week. This was right next to the marina and consisted of a village of reconstructed buildings from towns and villages around the old Zuiderzee before it was dammed in the last century. As well as very many ordinary houses there were all sorts of shops, workshops and businesses including ropemakers, fish smokers, wood and metalworking shops, a cheese maker, net maker and many many more, all presented in seemingly perfect detail. Many were actually working and in some cases selling their products. We had some good smoked herring for lunch. There was a church and a school. We wandered around the museum for several hours and then took a waterbus to the town.



The Zuiderzee Open Air Museum

ISW Day 7, 12th June, Enkhuizen to Marker Wadden

Another day with the temperature barely in double figures and the wind blowing a good force 4, but with a northwest today and the forecast of southwest tomorrow we joined six other boats in sailing to Marker Wadden, a man-made archipelago back in the Markermeer and The Netherland's newest land – so new in fact that it is not on my chart plotter! (see below)





With our two reefs still in from Amsterdam we had a breezy reach southeast inside the Visstokken dam, entering the archipelago through a well marked channel and tying up on the pontoon. We were met by one of the volunteers that seem to run the place, who explained that the purpose of Marker Wadden is to clean the water of the Markameer, but that it had also become a haven for wildlife.

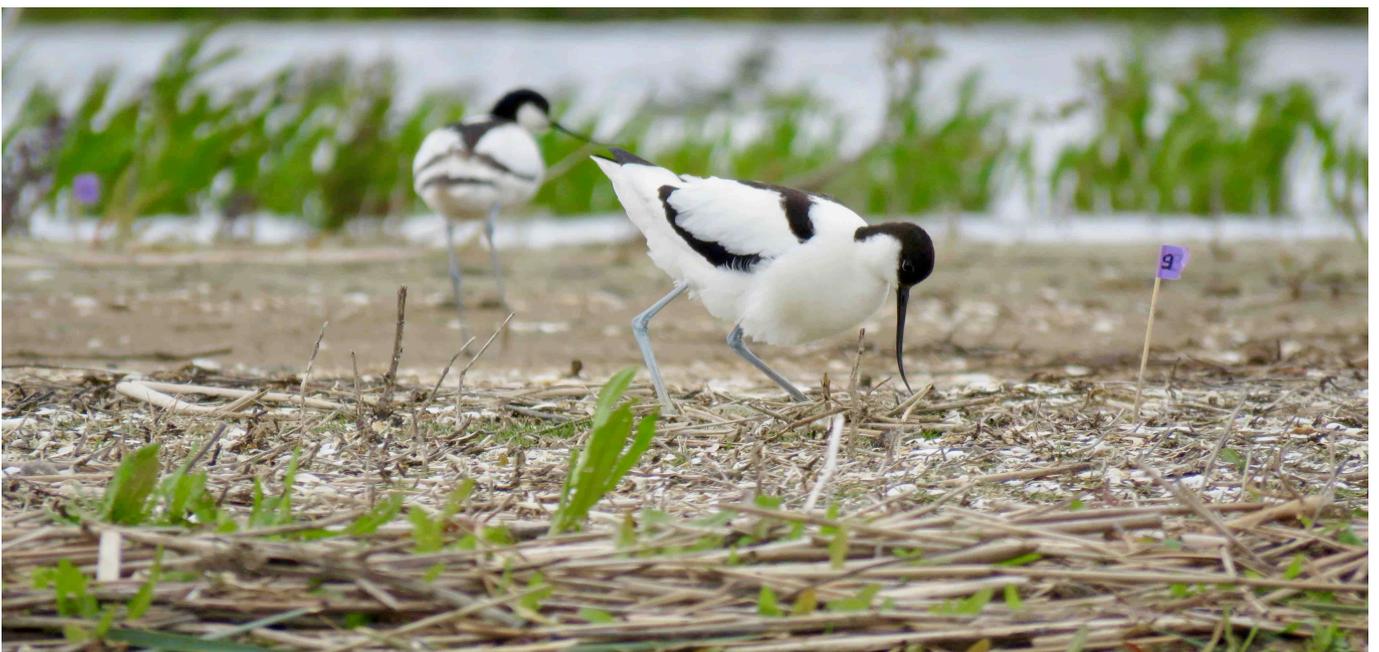


Moored up at Marker Wadden

Marker Wadden is a series of low sand islands just a few metres high and the cold wind that blew while we were there made it rather bleak, but the bird life was amazing. We walked around the main island for a few kms and were constantly surrounded by terns, geese, gulls, sandpipers and ducks. We also saw avocets, spoonbills and many many more, all contributing to the constant cacophony of screeching and squawking. There was also an interesting mix of plants, including lots of orchids, some of which had been planted and others that had found their own way there. The image below doesn't really do it justice.



Marker Wadden



ISW Day 8, 13th June, Marker Wadden to Medemblik

The forecasted westerly wind gave us one of the best sails of the week back to the lock at Enkhuizen, past the marina where we had stayed for two nights, and on northwards towards Medemblik. As we rounded the coast we were heading more into the wind and the last few miles were an uncomfortable windward sail into a choppy sea. After a 20 mile sail it was a relief to tie up in a pleasant corner of the harbour, close to the town centre. Medemblik is a big sailing centre where major regattas and championships are held. There were plenty of large and expensive yachts in the harbour that dominates the town.



One of the best sails of the week



Ending

On the morning of the 14th June there was an early departure by minibus the hour or so back to Naarden to collect our cars and trailers, which we drove back to Medemblik and parked at the regatta centre. Then we motored out of the harbour, past the ancient castle that guards the entrance and round to the regatta centre where there is a wide and shallow slipway and plenty of space. Getting Sparrow out of the water, onto her trailer and de-rigged went without a hitch and we had our last night aboard on the trailer in the car park.



Packed up and ready to go

The next morning we finished packing up the boat, ready for the most hazardous part of the whole trip from Cornwall to The Netherlands and back – driving the 500 miles or so back home. It was a very windy afternoon as we set off for the ferry at Hoek van Holland, arriving after a three and a half hour drive in good time for the night ferry to Harwich.

Sunday the 16th June was a very long day. We were quickly off the ferry and a little surprised to be waved through customs by some disinterested border force people. After all the stories about difficulties re-importing boats and the time spent researching and preparing documents we had a very easy time of it.

The day wore on and the miles gradually slipped by as we slowly made our way westwards at between 40 and 50 mph. To say that boats are more at home on water than on motorways is of course a big understatement and it was a huge relief to be parking Sparrow down at Pasco's boatyard in the evening within sight of her mooring.

St. Just to Amsterdam - Richard Salisbury

So after sailing nearly 700 miles, about 550 of which were single handed, and driving 1100 miles towing either an empty trailer or one with a boat on it, my journey is complete. It's been cold, windy and tedious at times but there has also been some great sailing and fascinating places to take in and remember. On top of that, my travelling companions both before and during the ISW, and the strangers I have met on the way, have made it the most wonderful trip. Thank you to the many people who have given me help, advice, hospitality or encouragement and if you get the chance to go sailing on your own – take it



The author Richard Salisbury with sailing companions Mark Jenkins and Gerry McGheen