



## Whitsun Cruise to Brittany 2007

Those boats which left the Exe late afternoon on Friday 25 May enjoyed a cracking sail to Dartmouth to join a total of 15 Club boats planning to cruise the Channel Islands and the Rose Coast of North Brittany. Unfortunately these winds were harbingers of stormy conditions which were to prevail for the next few days and kept the fleet tied to the Upper Ferry pontoon entertaining themselves by eating, drinking, reading, chatting and playing bridge to a background of overworked Eberspachers and drumming rain! It's not often Force 10 features in a shipping forecast in late May! The highlight has to be the "bring-a-plate-and-bottle" supper chez Melanie and Jonathan (Avocet) at their home in Dartmouth – a generous invitation which they may have regretted as the mountain of dripping Mustos and welly boots grew!

Mercifully, Tuesday brought a weather window but it proved too late and promised to be too brief for those with only a week. Five boats, Ashanta, Pickle, Riviera Magic, Termeric and ZigZag, took advantage and made a 4am start having an uneventful passage south about Les Hanois to slide over the sill before the next predicted strong south easterly arrived that night. Erin and Trintella of Avon had already crossed early Saturday. No one begrudged Wednesday in St Peter Port as the wind blew accompanied by yet more rain.

Thursday promised decreasing winds and we departed at 0800 for Lézardrieux while Erin headed for Herm and Alderney before returning cross Channel. A foul tide and head winds made for a wet and uncomfortable passage down the Russell but once clear of the Guernsey coast the seas settled. Head winds and strong cross tides made southerly progress on starboard tack impossibly slow and it soon became necessary for most to motor sail until we had cleared the dangers passing west-about Roches Douvres. Jersey Radio was still issuing a strong wind warning but conditions continued to improve as we closed the dramatic rocky coastline off Les Heaux and La Horaine. Guernsey to the Brittany coast always feels a long haul and it was good to enter the Trieux River and motor the 5 miles to Lézardrieux. Here we spent 3 days, unfortunately extended by problems with gear, but met up with Trintella who had been sheltering in Pontrieux. And at last we actually saw and felt the sun and managed to dry out!

On Sunday Ashanta returned to Guernsey while we left against the last of the flood till past Île de Brehat when we picked out the transit of the pyramid and Fisherman's Church to take the navigationally more interesting short cut westwards via the Moisie channel. Now, with the infamous Brittany ebb under us and a light north westerly, we made good time round La Jument before turning in again towards the coast. The wind dropped to barely F2 but the tide carried us comfortably to arrive off Mean Ruiz before it turned. We motored into the inner harbour at Ploumanac'h with all the associated fun and hassle of tying up to the trots. First-timers seemed neither too impressed by the big boobs nor by the serenading fisherman though in fairness further rain and overcast skies did not do justice to this remarkable and very beautiful part of the Côte de Rose with its dramatic approach scattered with huge pink granite boulders.

Next morning Trintella, who had joined us again from Tréguier, left early for the bright lights of Perros. The rest of us were away before 1100 to clear the sill and took a slow lazy sail into the Anse de Perros where we picked up the buoys off Pointe du Chateau for a lunchtime stop while awaiting a fair tide east. The passage via the Passe de l'Est and on to Basse Crublent was sailed in rather light north easterly winds in an uncomfortable short sea reminiscent of a south easterly in Lyme Bay.

As we turned to enter the Grande Passe the murky outline of the coast became even more indistinct and by Pen ar Guezec we were in dense fog with visibility less than 50m. Thanks to electronics we were able to continue very slowly with only one brief heart-flutter when La Corne tower suddenly reared up out of the fog seemingly only a couple of boat lengths ahead of the lead boat. Once past Skeiviec the fog started to thin and the last few miles were in pleasant evening sun until we turned the last corner to see the skeletal spire of Tréguier Cathedral.

The fascinating medieval cité of Tréguier immediately exerted its charm over us all and we were content to spend 3 nights here exploring the ancient alleys and streets, the beautiful cathedral with its 15<sup>th</sup> century cloister, snacking in the cafes and bars and shopping in the Wednesday market. Neither the cool, muggy weather nor the evil reputation of its cross-tide pontoons could detract from its charms as a popular cruise stopover. On our final night we all gathered in Pickle's "stateroom" for an excellent communal meal.

Sadly it was time to look towards returning. On Friday we stemmed the last 2 hours of the flood to motor down river and then sailed in a frustrating northeasterly wind which thought nothing of fluking through 30 degrees. This always seems an interminable and boring passage which takes far longer than it should. The faster boats made St Peter Port just as the sill was opening while the slower ones slipped in a little after dark.

Riviera Magic and Termaric left very early on Saturday for a tiring passage direct to Dartmouth in fog. Pickle, Trintella and ZigZag opted for a gentler lunchtime departure for Alderney. Visibility had improved to about a mile but soon after passing Platte Fougère dense fog closed in obliging us to rely once again on electronics. Winds were light, it was a neap tide with only a slight sea and we had planned to arrive south of the island shortly before slack water. Conditions therefore being appropriate, the decision was made to enter via the Swinge which we did cautiously (and of course blindly) taking care to avoid both the reefs and Corbet rock and the currents drawing us towards Burhou, and only occasionally were we conscious of eerie swirls as we passed over submerged rocks. Our final measured and precise course change on the plotter brought us into Braye when the first thing we saw was the square-rigger, Thalassa, which suddenly appeared at anchor! We were well inside the wall and among the moorings. That night we went ashore for a drink and agreed a 0600 departure if visibility was fair – with no radar among us we were reluctant to cross the traffic lanes in the dense fog we had experienced that day.

At 0545 on Sunday the sun was up as well as us and visibility was some 3 miles. By 0600 we had slipped the buoys, cleared the Admiralty breakwater and raised sail. The wind was light but easterly giving the first proper off-wind conditions of the cruise which those who had them colourfully celebrated by breaking out spinnakers or cruising chutes. Indeed it settled in the east – F2 or 3 – and with a smooth sea we enjoyed a broad reach for 50nm until around 1600 when, with 20 miles still to go, it died away obliging us to motor. We entered the Exe at low water feeling we had salvaged a very enjoyable cruise, in delightful company, from what had been an inauspicious start 2 weeks earlier. Congratulations especially to those for whom it was a first landfall on the Brittany coast with all that implies in meeting the pilotage challenge of a rocky coastline and powerful tides.

Tony Leigh 'ZigZag'