

SHELDUCK'S CRUISE FROM AMERICA Chesapeake to Cork, 2015-2016

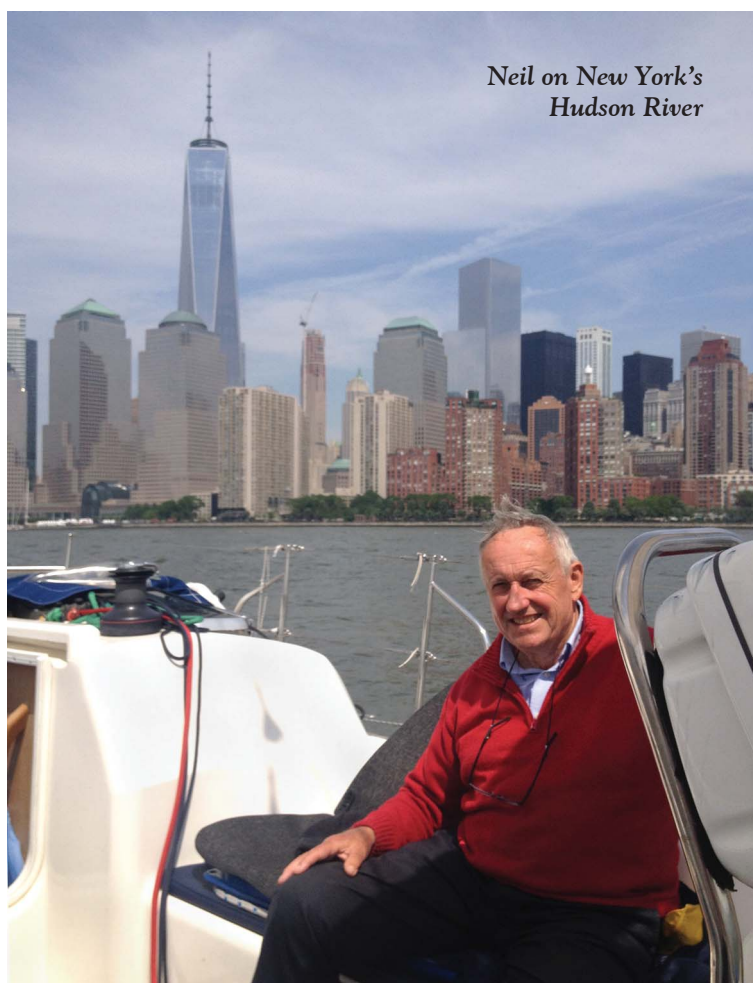
Neil Hegarty and Anne Kenny

(Shelduck – a Dufour 34 launched in 2003 – together with Neil and Anne, previously featured in Flying Fish 2016/1, which carried the story of her passage from Lisbon, Portugal to Norfolk, Virginia, via St Lucia and a multitude of other places. By 2016 it was time for her to return home...)

When I first invited Anne Kenny to join me on *Shelduck* for a short cruise from Cascais to Sines and back in September 2009 she said, "Okay, but not more than 30 miles a day". I was a little surprised but obliged. The following year, as she gained confidence in *Shelduck* – and in the skipper as well – and remembering her 150 mile passages from Crookhaven to the Scilly Isles with her late husband Brian in their Chance 37, *Tam O'Shanter*, she was happy to do an overnight with me and increase *Shelduck's* permitted

passages to 150 miles. This quickly increased to 1000 miles and then 2000 miles. Anne's 2000 mile preference was a major influence on my decision, when returning *Shelduck* to Cork after eight years away from home, to plan a route via the US East Coast and Newfoundland.

After *Shelduck's* Cruise to America recounted in *Flying Fish* 2016/1 she overwintered at Atlantic Yacht Basin near Virginia's Great Bridge. We returned there in May 2015 to cruise the East Coast of the United States as far as Southwest Harbor, Maine. It was a wonderful experience and, in



*Neil on New York's
Hudson River*



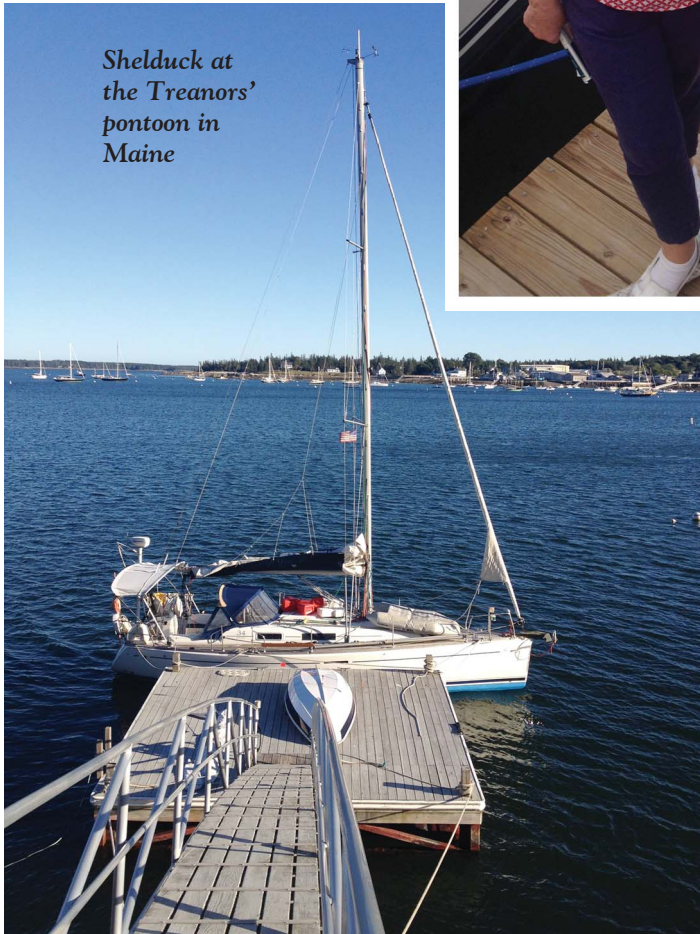
Anne with John Treanor

particular, we enjoyed our cruise of the Chesapeake, sailing into New York, Newport with its wonderful houses, and cruising Maine.

In early June 2016 we returned to Southwest Harbour and collected *Shelduck* from the Hinkley Boatyard spending a few days with OCC friends Mary and John Treanor, before heading off for Newfoundland and our Atlantic crossing via New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Some of the highlights were traversing the Reversing



***Shelduck at
the Treanors'
pontoon in
Maine***



Falls into the St John River, having the Mayor of Halifax, Belfast-born Mike Savage, and his wife Darlene aboard *Shelduck* for lunch while at the marina of the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron, and cruising the Bras d'Or Lake.

On Saturday 16th July the tide suited our 0530 departure from Baddeck, Bras d'Or, to take the ebb through the narrow 20 mile passage to St Ann's Bay and the Gulf of St



With Mike Savage, Mayor of Halifax, and his wife Darlene

Lawrence. The first two hours were in thick fog, but *Shelduck* just made it out of the passage before the tide turned against her and progress was slowed. We passed Neil Harbour and Neil Head, and rounded Long Point into Dingwall. This is another beautiful anchorage and hurricane hole, but the entrance is shallow with shifting sands and has to be dredged – the buoys marking the current channel are paramount.

Anne with Reg and Gord Hackett



West Newfoundland

Next day there was no wind so we motored towards St Paul Island. As *Shelduck* crossed the northern Cabot Strait traffic separation zone I decided to press on overnight to the Bay of Islands and we rounded Cape Cormorant at midnight – it protrudes 25 miles out from the mainland, a little like the Old Head of Kinsale, but with no light. We rounded South Head into the Bay of Islands at 1015, left Woods Island to port, and berthed at the Bay of Islands Yacht Club at 1400. I had chosen this club to get a wifi signal to send the blog, but more importantly to get diesel and treated water for our tanks. Both are in short supply in this area.

Shelduck departed at 1515 on the 19th and beat the 14 miles to the harbour at Woods Island under headsail in a fresh breeze. This entry is tricky but well-described in the CCA pilot *The Cruising Guide to Newfoundland*. We found the pontoon, which is owned by the Bay of Islands Yacht Club, with just one boat on it, a Crystal Waters Boat Tours vessel. This gave us confidence to go in, where we were helped to dock.

After dinner, at about 2100, there was a knock on the hull and I invited the two men there aboard. They had seen the Irish flag and were curious. They were native to the island and cousins, but had been relocated to the mainland as were all inhabitants after the burning of a church and a schoolhouse. They introduced themselves as Reg and Gord Hackett, of Irish ancestry but they did not know from where. I suggested maybe Waterford, and told them the story of the Sack of Baltimore and the Hackett who had guided the Algerians in. We enjoyed a glass of wine and a chat with them for an hour. At 2200 they invited us to their house for cards, but because of our 0530 start next day we reluctantly refused.



Cold weather cover-up

This beautiful bay had lived up to our expectations, but *Shelduck* needed to press on and we had a good run to Cow Head in 15–20 knots of wind. This harbour is well-protected with nice timber covered walls – no fender boards required. We had an early start again next morning, with an exhilarating broad reach of 56 miles in 20 knots to Port aux Choux. It was difficult to find a place to tie up, but the Coast Guard allowed us to berth at their floating dock for the night. We dined ashore at the Anchor Cafe and finished off with the local dessert, figgy-duff.



*Shelduck at Red
Bay, Labrador*

Labrador

July 21st produced a light wind so we motor-sailed across the Strait of Belle Isle to Red Bay, Labrador. We saw one whale making its way west and three going east, and many dolphins followed us as *Shelduck* crossed the traffic separation zone. As we approached Red Bay fog came down and I found myself slightly on the wrong side of a port mark – having the fog lying on the water and the near land above on view was confusing. The water was crystal clear, however, and we could see 6m down. We docked at the government wharf in a hurricane-proof spot, tucked inside the south end. Even so, I had to come up once during the night – in very heavy rain – to adjust the fenders when the wind came up. Next day began with breakfast in the Whaler Restaurant, which was good with excellent sausages.

There was a thriving whale fishery in Red Bay for about 70 years, beginning in the 1530s. Whalers from the Basque region of Spain and France used the harbour as a seasonal base for hunting the whales and processing their oil, and four 16th century whaling vessels have been found in the harbour along with several smaller boats used by the whalers. Red Bay is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

North Newfoundland

On Sunday 24th of July we departed Red Bay at 0530 with no fog or rain – just another grey, cloudy day. *Shelduck* crossed the Belle Isle traffic separation zone to round Cape Norman at 0920 and Cape Onion at 1115, then on to Sacred Bay and into Médée Bay to berth at the pontoon of the Viking Museum at L'Anse aux Meadows. The weather was calm, so I decided to stay at the pontoon overnight and sail directly to Lewisporte, our departure point for the Atlantic crossing, over the next two days. An hour after leaving L'Anse, we saw our first iceberg. Then, as we sailed between the White Islands and Partridge Point, near Quirpon Island, there were so many whales near *Shelduck* that we began to worry for her safety, but none made contact with her. During the 30-hour passage to Lewisporte we sighted a further ten icebergs, but the night was clear and they looked beautiful in the moonlight.

We berthed in Lewisporte Marina, the largest marina in Atlantic Canada, at 1300 on 26th July. It is an excellent facility close to all services, and I decided to use its hoist to lift *Shelduck* out to check everything on the hull before another Atlantic crossing. Captain Peter Watkins, the prime mover in the publication of the *Cruising Guide to Notre Dame Bay* whom we met shortly after arrival, arranged with his friend, Rick Small, to let us have the use of a Jeep Grand Cherokee. We had planned to hire a car but Rick's generosity made this unnecessary. We visited Fogo Island, where I enquired about the location of the Irish community and was told 'turn right at the school'. Tilting, on the northeast coast of Fogo Island, was founded by the French in the early 17th century. Permanent settlement followed in the 1720s, and by the 1770s it had become a predominantly Irish community which is still inhabited by descendants of its early families. While continuing to evolve, this community contains an unusually complete range of vernacular building types. The arrangements and inter-relationships of traditional buildings and spaces have largely been maintained, and Tilting survives as a rare example of a once-common Irish-Newfoundland cultural landscape which is well worth a visit.

We went into the Dwyer House, a cultural centre, and the Lane House, a museum,



Icebergs off St Anthony

and finally discovered the famous Foley's Shed where we received a warm welcome from Phillip and Maureen Foley. There were pictures of a visit of *Northabout*, with Jarlath Cunnane, Mike Alexander and Paddy Barry featuring. None of *Shelduck's* crew offered to sing, but Maureen entertained us with her guitar. The Shed was flying the Green, White and Pink, the flag of the pre-1949 Republic of Newfoundland – at first I thought it was a faded flag of the Republic of Ireland. We also drove to Botwood, the base for the world's first transatlantic flights to and from Foynes in Ireland. We enjoyed the Heritage Museum, the Flying Boat Museum and the crowds who were celebrating Botwood Day. The remainder of the week was spent aboard completing our lists of jobs.

The Atlantic Crossing

For both Atlantic passages I invited two younger people to join Anne and me aboard *Shelduck*, and for this one it was Charlie Kavanagh and my son Paul, who was put in charge of communication by sat phone to download GRIB* files, and keep in contact with his brother Tom at home for weather routeing. I chose Thursday 11th August as departure day. We were aware that August is a hurricane month and that icebergs might still be around – Don Street does not include wind conditions for August for

* For those unfamiliar with GRIB files, I can do no better than quote weather guru Frank Singleton's MailASail-sponsored website which states that: **GR**idded Information in Binary files provide a low-cost way of getting a great deal of weather forecast information. For more information visit <http://weather.mailasail.com/Franks-Weather/Grib-Files-Explained>.

this passage on the back of Imray's *North Atlantic Passage Chart*. We also realised that the northern part of the North Atlantic can be one of the most dangerous places in the world to sail.

Shelduck departed Lewisporte at 1330 on 11th August as planned, in a light southwesterly with Anne and me taking the first watch. The following day, about 100 miles from land, an exhausted goshawk found *Shelduck* and tried to land on the top of the mast, breaking the active radar reflector. On its second attempt it broke the Windex, and on its third damaged the VHF aerial, reducing our AIS warning of shipping from 15 or 20 miles to 4 miles. It then tried to settle on one of the crosstrees, before eventually dropping to the deck where it stayed for about two hours. Charlie tried to feed it but it wasn't interested.

On Saturday I was anticipating a northwesterly force 4–6, but by 1300 it was force 7–8. Earlier, at 1145, a big sea had dislodged two of the diesel cans on deck, but Paul and Charlie reattached them. We decided to heave-to for 24 hours with the No.4 jib on the inner forestay and three reefs in the main. We should perhaps have been down to the fourth reef and storm jib, and because of being over-canvassed suffered a small hole in the new main, which was not reinforced at the crosstrees.

The skipper and crew continued regular watches during the storm but from below, adding quarter-hourly lookouts for possible shipping in the area. We estimated the breaking waves at 6m, some of them hitting so hard it was like banging *Shelduck* off a concrete wall. They worked over the deck, pushing *Shelduck* sideways so that water was driven back onto the deck on the lee side. We were still in the Labrador Current, and in the 24 hours we were hove-to drifted 71 miles southeast, an average of nearly 3 knots. By 1400 on Sunday the wind had reduced to 25–30 knots, so we flew the No. 4 only, which we carried into Monday. At 1500 I noticed that the speed over the ground was slower than the speedometer in the cockpit, which meant that *Shelduck* was in an

Our visiting goshawk



area of contra-current, which she remained in until 0315 on Tuesday 16th. By 1500 that day the wind had gone very light, so the engine was started, and these conditions continued through Wednesday with the wind now light easterly.

That afternoon Tom informed us that a low was forming 200 miles south of Newfoundland, forecast to track from there to Scotland, and that we could expect to be in the middle of it by midday Friday if we headed southward. Tom suggested that we head for Biarritz, France, but later I decided to head for Pico in the Azores. It was a broad reach in a smooth sea, doing over 7 knots at times. At 1700 on Friday 19th we changed down to the storm jib and for the first time put the fourth reef in the main. Soon after that we were in the centre of the weather system and hove-to again for six hours.

Next morning at 0530 we turned the engine on to motor-sail east at 4.5 knots in dense fog. Then on Sunday 21st the northwesterly filled in, and while he was on watch with storm jib only Paul experienced the strongest winds yet, which our wind instruments recorded at 39.4 knots – the top end of force 8. The autopilot behaved very well in the 5m seas, with *Shelduck* only broaching three times in three hours and brought back on track each time without Paul's assistance. During the early afternoon about thirty pilot whales appeared, enjoying the waves and staying with us for about six hours.

0430 on Monday brought a strong squall and a broach, after which I took down the main and settled *Shelduck* on a broad reach towards the Fastnet Rock, now 649 miles away, under storm jib only. By next day the low had slowed off Ireland and left *Shelduck* in a fresh northwesterly, which continued until land was sighted at 1930 on Friday 26th – The Bull, off Dursey Head. The wind then went southeast, so I altered course to come in north of Cape Clear Island. At 0730 on Saturday 27th, near the Mealbeg Rock off Turk Head, *Shelduck* met Paul's Rankin punt with his wife Nuala and their three children, and my daughter Patricia and brother-in-law Fergus aboard to welcome us home. *Shelduck* berthed at the village pontoon in Baltimore Harbour at 0800 and we opened a couple of bottles of prosecco. After breakfast Charlie left for home, and next day Anne was collected by her daughter Heather and returned to Tralee.

After just one night sleeping on land I returned to *Shelduck* on Sunday 28th with my daughter Patricia, and Paul's children Daniel aged 14 and Francis aged 11. We were all out of our bunks at 0515 the following morning for the passage to the Royal Cork Yacht Club at Crosshaven. This gave the children the experience of sailing in the darkness and seeing the lights, including the Fastnet, and Daniel steering most of the way to the RCYC marina where *Shelduck* berthed at 1600.

Our three-year Atlantic circuit from Cascais to Cork had covered 11,568 miles. The cruise from the Chesapeake to Cork accounted for 4555 of them, of which 2032 were on the passage from Lewisporte to Baltimore. If I was crossing west to east again in a 34-footer, which I won't be, I would head for the Azores after leaving Newfoundland, until I was south of 48°N, then head east until conditions suited a northeast passage towards Ireland. This should help avoid storms, but maybe not hurricanes.

The stars of this cruise and Atlantic crossing were:

1. The welcoming, helpful and interesting people we met during our many visits to American and Canadian yacht clubs.

A 'welcome home' sunset on arrival at the Royal Cork YC in Crosshaven



2. *Shelduck* herself, a Dufour 34 which I bought off the plans in 2003 at the London Boat Show from Donal McClement of Crosshaven Boat Yard. She was designed by Umberto Felci and Patrick Roséo, and has a European Recreational Craft Directive certificate for Category A, unlimited ocean use. I have not had a moment of anxiety from her in over 20,000 miles of sailing.
3. After I met her, Anne encouraged me to fit an autopilot on *Shelduck*. I ordered a mechanical linear drive rather than the wheel drive normal for 34-footers. It has never skipped a beat on any point of sailing, no matter what the Atlantic threw at it.
4. The Facnor inner forestay roller-reefing system. This allowed us to change easily and quickly from the No 4 to the storm jib and back again in heavy weather.

Anne and I have been very lucky since becoming widow and widower on the deaths of our spouses in 2008. We met on Santa Maria at the 2009 ICC/RCC meet in the Azores, and since then have cruised over 24,000 miles together, in her *Tam O'Shanter* and in *Shelduck*, around the 5500 mile imaginary line from St Petersburg in the north to Grenada in the south. We don't intend to hang up our sea boots just yet, and plan to continue cruising both boats for as long as we can.

