

OUR FRIEND LORENZO AND THE RESCUE THAT NEVER HAPPENED

Toby Peyton-Jones

(Having bought Truant, a Bowman 40, in Plymouth in June 2018, the following summer saw Toby cruise her to Brittany and the Channel Islands, then head north via the Isles of Scilly to South Wales. Turning west, they headed round the 'outside' of Ireland with the ultimate destination of Largs on the Firth of Clyde. We join them at Kilrush on the River Shannon).



Following a warm welcome at Cork and Dingle from Port Officers Mike Hodder and Harvey Kenny, I left *Truant* at Kilrush to attend to some work commitments, returning two weeks later to continue north towards Westport. The tomtom drums had already been at work and Mike had alerted Alex and Daria Blackwell, POs for Westport, County Mayo, that *Truant* was heading their way late in the season. I had independently exchanged e-mails with Alex suggesting we should keep in touch as we headed north.

Toby at the helm of Truant

Truant in Kilrush Marina





*The Truant crew aboard Aleria in Kilronan harbour, Inish Mor, Aran Islands.
Left to right: Sam Holton (Truant), Alex Blackwell, John Stockdale (Truant),
Daria Blackwell, Toby Peyton Jones (Truant)*

We left Kilrush on Sunday 29th September in a force 6 on the nose to drop the hook in Carrigaholt Bay on the north bank of the river in order to allow new crew members John and Sam to familiarise themselves with the boat. Next day we had a wonderful sail with blue skies and northwesterlies from Loop Head, at the river mouth, north to the Aran Islands. The air was crystal clear and the arrival – with the sun shining on the cliffs and the blue sea breaking white on to the black-layered rocks that are such a feature of these islands viewed from the south – was stunning. We rounded Dog's Head and were soon picking up a mooring in Killeany Bay, but not before we had spotted a large and rather beautiful yacht approaching from the north. As she followed us into the bay I could only think she must be *Aleria*, Alex and Daria's Bowman 57 ketch...

A few beers later we were sitting snugly in *Aleria*'s cockpit laughing about our happy chance meeting. I was reminded of sailors of previous centuries who would heave-to when they met another ship at sea in order to row over and exchange news and thoughts about what might lie ahead or adventures they had survived. And so it was with us. We learned that Daria and Alex were heading south to Kilrush in a stripped-out *Aleria*, which had been their home from home for 15 years. It was clearly a huge moment for them and a sharp reminder of how a boat can become such a close and intimate companion, trusted with the lives of friends and loved ones in good times and in bad. These moments and the adventures that you share together are hard to part with, but Alex was quick to point out that *Aleria* will go on to new adventures with new owners and, despite the catch in Daria's voice, their eyes lit up when they mentioned their next quest, to find a lifting-keel boat that would open up new and unexplored opportunities.

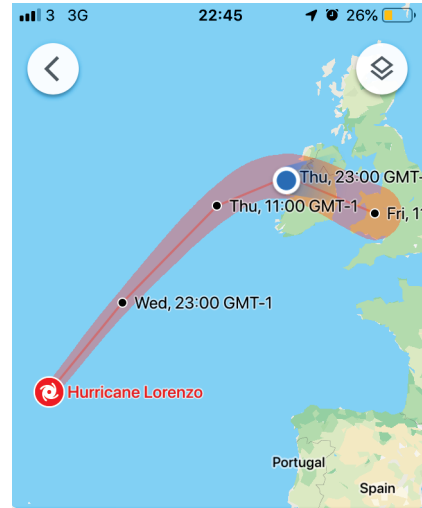
Hurricane Lorenzo's forecast track. The blue dot is where Truant was at that moment

By this time Alex had gone below, mentioning some 100° proof rum that he used variously as paint stripper, fish anaesthetizer and in cocktails for the very brave. I stuck to beer as the conversation turned to Hurricane *Lorenzo* and which model of its possible track might transpire to be true. We had all been keeping an eye on it, and discussed it to and fro, with Daria explaining that the jet stream had a wobble in it which made predication very difficult. I had to agree with her – after yet another beer everything for me had begun to wobble a bit. We parted saying ‘let’s keep in touch’, but not before Alex and Daria had told us that they had a bomb-proof mooring just off their house if we needed it. I opened Navionics on my iPhone and Alex pointed to a maze of islands that lie in Clew Bay to the north of Westport, and to a very unlikely looking pool at the innermost point of this flooded drumlin field of islands. That was where their mooring lay.

One forecast model had *Lorenzo* brushing past Cork and off into Biscay while another had it going north to Iceland, and I had developed plans for both scenarios ... but

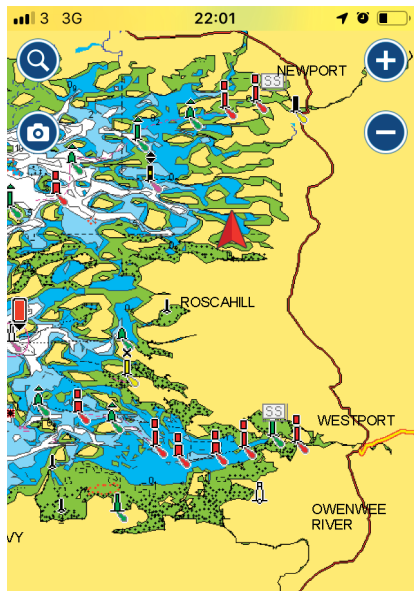
scroll forward a couple of days and we had an eerily calm Wednesday with gunmetal clouds and sea and a solid forecast that *Lorenzo* was going to hit the coast right at Clew Bay, coming ashore just where we were. So with one call to Alex, we wove our way through the island waterways to reach their mooring – a one-ton block with three Rocna-style anchors laid in different directions – the evening before the storm was to hit. Alex later said he was amazed we had managed it on our own. He had been taken up with other commitments, but would normally have met anyone attempting to enter, to pilot them through the island shallows and fish farms. After all, the last surveys of the area date back to the 1800s.

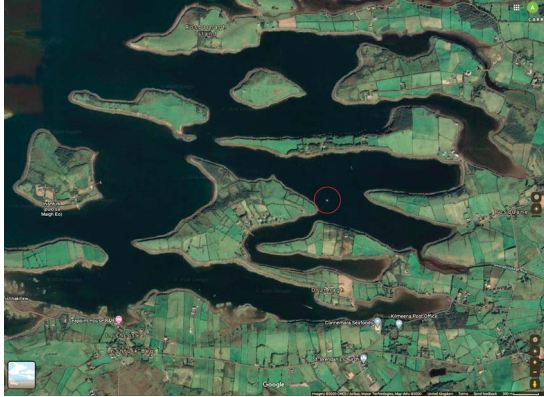
The intricate approach to Alex and Daria's mooring in Clew Bay



Hurricane Lorenzo

Ireland
Updated 2 Oct at 20:21 GMT-1





Truant's location in Clew Bay (circled) during the storm

It was great to pick up their mooring and then read Alex's e-mail and call Daria to inform them we'd arrived safely. Daria said they would pick us up off the boat to stay ashore with them while *Lorenzo* passed through. We then spent some hours preparing *Truant* for the blow – mainsail and staysail off

and down below, double bridles on the bow, forward cleats backed up to midship cleats to distribute the weight of the bridle, all chafing points painstakingly sorted, all deck equipment like cockpit table and life buoys down below, and the cockpit hood lashed down. Finally, the seacocks were closed and the hatches battened down.

I had been in two minds about going ashore, as part of me wanted to stay with the boat overnight when the wind would be at its height, but I was forced to admit that if anything happened in such a confined anchorage I would be more of a liability to those who would have to come to my rescue than a help to my dear *Truant*. While these thoughts resolved themselves in my mind the wind started to blow up to 35–40 knots out of the southeast. The next minute the rescue party, with Alex's smiling, wind-swept face and a small tender, arrived to take us ashore for the night.

Daria and Alex outside their house, with Toby's nephew Sam



*Daria and
her donkeys*

Truant looked secure as she receded in our wave-flecked wake and I was forced to admit that we had done all we could. As we stepped ashore we were ushered up to 'Port Aleria', Alex and Daria's home, where we briefly dropped our stuff before setting out to lift one neighbour's small boat up to safe ground above any tidal surge, and put away another neighbour's garden furniture in case it got blown away.



That done it wasn't long before Daria was plying a very relieved and happy crew with food and showers. That evening, lubricated by wine we had brought from *Truant* as well as Irish whiskey and Caribbean rum that seemed to flow in dangerous quantities, we talked late into the night while the wind slowly increased outside. We turned in, and between 2am and 5am the house shuddered and my mind could not help but think of trusty *Truant* straining at her mooring. But as the sky lightened and the wind dropped, my crew and I crept out to walk to the headland from which we could see *Truant* lying confidently, and to my mind rather nonchalantly, to the now much-subdued wind.

We surmised that the eye was passing over us and that soon the wind would shift to the southwest and start blowing again, but not before we walked up over the hilly terrain of the Blackwells' land to gaze down on the drumlins of Clew Bay and the mountains running along both its sides. Indeed, soon the wind shifted, the rain came pouring down, and the highest gusts recorded were 65 knots, fortunately slightly less than the Met Eireann forecast of 130 km/hr (70.2 knots).

The following day we found out that Daria looked after a nine-strong donkey sanctuary and kept a team of about four cats, some of whom were full-time family members while others seemed to use Port Aleria as lodgings only on nights that were convenient for them. It seemed to me that John, Sam and I were just the latest refugees that Alex and Daria had taken in!

I had other reflections as well. I remember my father saying that most seafaring accidents

are set in train by decisions taken before one leaves port. In this case, a potentially very serious situation had been avoided due to a number of factors:

- Being alert and keeping a critical eye on potential danger over the horizon.
- Having not just Plan A, but Plan B and Plan C as well. (How many out there have, like me, led a life that has been mainly Plan B?)
- When you are travelling, always reaching out to the fellow seafaring community wherever you meet them. Your combined wisdom and resources may shape new options (Plan D), refresh or challenge your thinking, and at the very least you will make new friends.
- Joining the OCC ... the most wonderful network of like-minded, open-hearted people scattered around the edges of our oceans.

