

SAILING THE SOUTH COAST OF NEWFOUNDLAND

Jan Steenmeijer

(Corrie and Jan come from the Netherlands and have been sailing together for many years. In the past they were on board almost every weekend from early spring until late in the season, but were limited to a single four-week cruise during the summer. Now retired, they've been 'on the road' aboard Livingstone, their aluminium Koopmans 45 cutter – which features on this issue's front cover – since 2015. They crossed the Atlantic in 2017, intent on 'seeing the sights but mostly sailing', and so far their voyage has covered more than 25,000 miles. Follow it at www.sylivingstone.com, currently in Dutch only, but readily translatable online.)

In March 2019 we left Bonaire and, via Colombia, Panama and Jamaica, sailed up the East Coast of America for the second time. What an experience, to wake up in Newfoundland and see our surroundings. Mountains and multi-coloured houses are all around us, the only thing we hear is a waterfall and the sun is peeping over the mountaintop. A 'good morning *Livingstone*, welcome to François Bay!'. Although we are quite satisfied with where we are, we see some concern from a local who is afraid that we have caught the anchor line of the pontoon. We do not share his concern, but get the anchor and move a little further away. A small effort, right?

We are eager as young cattle to go up the 'mountain' – that is what we have missed lately – but we soon discover that we are dressed too warmly. On the water it is quite chilly, but on land it is already nice and warm as we walk up the Cove Trail in jeans, sweater, shoes and socks (when was the last time we wore those?). We meet Greg, who quickly shows us the other trails that we can walk from the village and says that

François Bay





A short trail

*Pitcher plants
up the
mountain*



if we have dirty laundry or want to go online, 'please, be my guest'. Being able to use the internet is a particular blessing because the Nova Scotia contract with provider Bell (\$155 per month, and then made out in the name of a complete stranger) does not work here nor, as we will find out later, in several places along the south coast of

Newfoundland). It is also very nice to have our sheets thoroughly washed in an 8kg washing machine on hot (a big difference from swirling in a 2.5 kilo drum, although we are very happy with that method too).

When we get up next day it is sunny, but by the time we hit the road it is already quite cloudy and when we have just started our climb the rain falls steadily. We experience first-hand how quickly the weather in Newfoundland can change, but even knowing

Picnic on the Friar Trail ...



that we do not turn back (it can get dry again quickly?) and we continue climbing. We have opted for the Friar Trail and we will not be discouraged by a bit of rain. The only thing the weather achieves is that we keep going at a quick pace. We have our



planned picnic while standing up, shivering slightly, but skip the planned swim in one of the many mountain lakes (we are already wet) and so are back within three hours. We are a bit wet but we enjoyed it a lot.

Newfoundland, with the emphasis on *New* and the rest is mumbled after that, has a fast-declining population. The government has already disbanded many villages (some have completely disappeared) and is trying to concentrate the population in certain places along the coast. The question is whether that will succeed in François Bay. Despite all kinds of subsidised facilities, such as a satellite connection through which internet and television is available in the entire village, there are only six pupils in the local school. The young people are leaving, and the majority of the 90 people who live here are our age, so the big question is – what about in another 25 years? We see some similarities with the north of the Netherlands, but with the emphasis on *some*, because the shrinkage problem in Groningen is child's play compared to that of Newfoundland.

We decide to spend longer in this region. We are here now and it is way too beautiful to just zip through. We decide not to sail back to the US until September or October. Although very tempted, we do not head southeast when we leave the fjord of François Bay and pass up on the French islands 40 miles away. No pâté, no wine, no baguettes. We can do without the pâté, *le pain qui je fais moi-même est formidable* and I cannot comment on the amount of wine that's under the cabin sole.

We therefore head west, and in just under two hours we are turning into La Hune Bay. It takes almost as long to get anchored, the fjord is so deep, but then you are in an incredible place – a private bay with a beach that leads to a river with clear, delicious, fresh water. We are lucky with the weather because it is sunny. On board it is cool because there is a strong breeze, but on the beach it is very nice – time for a book (Corrie) and a nap (me). The sun warms the fine gravel over which the water slowly seeks its way, and I sit/lie with my body on the warm stones, immersed in the clearest (cold) water I have ever felt. What a sensational place!



La Hune Bay

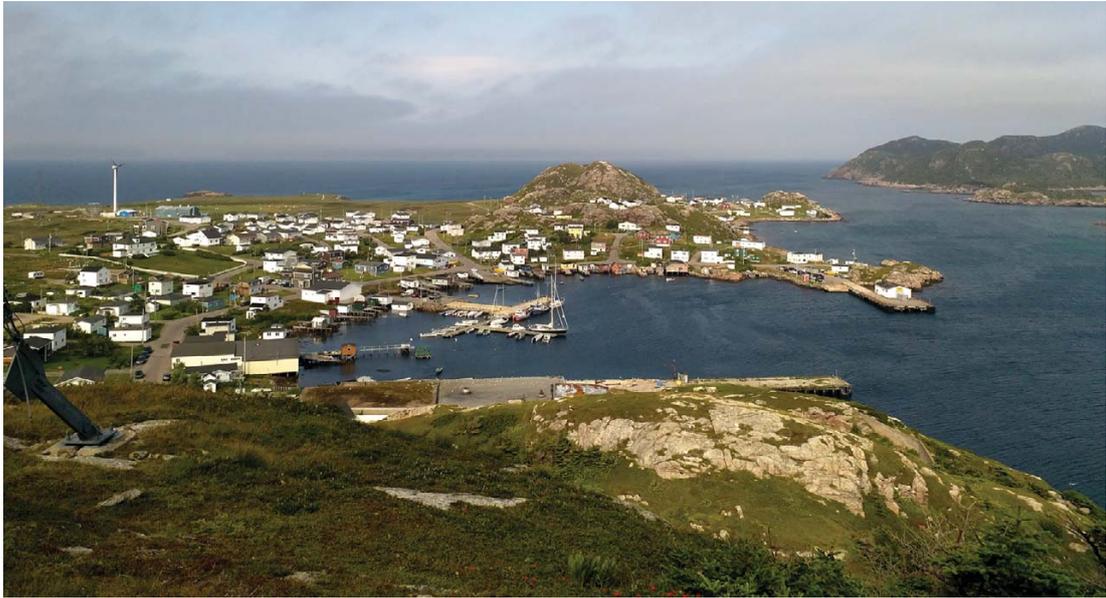
You have to know about Grey River, otherwise you would just sail past it. The entrance to this fjord is very well camouflaged. We have a good chart and a plotter so it is a piece of cake for us, but would that have been the case in the past, when people first came here? We know from the chart what is behind the curve, but back then? We have perfect sailing conditions from La Hune Bay so we go like a missile. The plan was to get out of the fjord with the current and back into the Grey River with the current, but we are too early, so we slowly make our way inwards against 2 knots of current. Once inside the current is not so bad, and we pass Jerts Cove, a settlement of only 50 inhabitants, to sail the six miles to the back of the fjord, another amazing place.

We are told that there are no man-made trails here but that if we go ashore we can follow a 'deer trail' – just our kind of thing, right? At the beginning we are a bit insecure, but soon we see tracks (hooves and droppings) telling us where we should go, and eventually we end up like Moose and Moosa in a place with an amazing view over the fjord. On the way back we almost do it at a trot (Corrie even feels two bumps on my head).



Moose and Moosa

In the afternoon the watermaker needs attention, but with new water in the tanks happy hour can be celebrated exuberantly again and we prepare for Bear

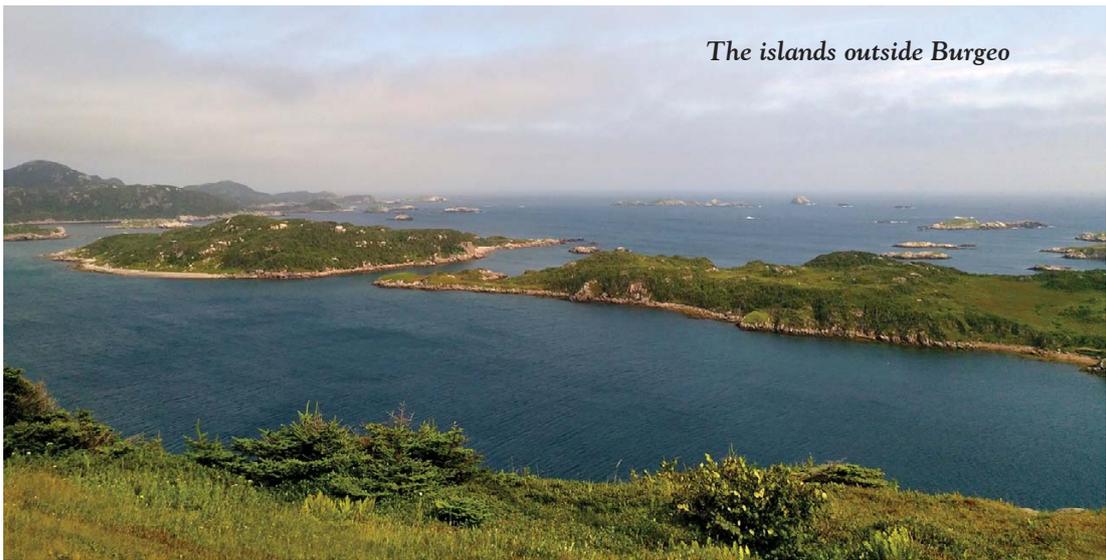


Ramea Island, with Livingstone alongside the town pontoon

Island, our next stop ... but first we let the tide go up and down again two more times.

On the way to Doctor Harbour on Bear Island my phone suddenly starts ringing and the apps and e-mails roll in. It is a mystery to me how that is possible, but always nice when you are at sea and messages arrive, especially if you have not been online for five days. The connection lasted so briefly that we completely forget to download new weather reports, but it is quiet when we drop anchor in Doctor Harbour and will remain so as long as we are there alone. No sound, no ripple on the water, just the two of us.

The internet signal must have come from the Ramea Islands. For the much-needed communication we sail there, although it is a bit out of our way, but when we get there and secure to a pontoon the world opens up to us again. We go for a walk and meet a man from the Canadian Coast Guard who sits for 8 hours every day in his



The islands outside Burgeo

lighthouse high on the mountain. He is happy to be able to have a chat, having already spotted us at sea. In under four hours we have walked around the entire island and we commence our housework. It's raining and the foghorn is howling every 15 seconds, so why hurry? We stay for the day.

It promises to be a beautiful sail to Burgeo with 12–14 knots of wind forecast – perfect conditions. The drinking water on Ramea Island is praised for its quality so we fill up our tanks and then head off, ten miles to the west. Unfortunately the forecast does not come true, so we float and float. Only in the afternoon does the wind come up and we get our sail to Burgeo.

As beautiful as the weather was yesterday, so depressing it is now – one day great, followed by weather that is nice for a while but not for long. It is abundantly clear that autumn is making its appearance. We are in the boat today with the heater on, but tomorrow the weather may be different. A day in Newfoundland is like Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The beautiful moments alternate at lightning speed with the lesser ones, and when you think 'the jacket can come off' you may find you are wrong. We did not see much of Burgeo. After rain with a lot of wind we got fog – and how! Time to sit close together inside by the stove.

Then next day you wake up under a clear blue sky as if it had never been otherwise, though the optimistic 'only a T-shirt' is immediately punished outside because a clear blue sky does not mean Caribbean temperatures. With a nice wind from behind we sail to

The most beautiful place ...



Culotte Cove on Cinq Cerf Bay in a few hours. With clothes on, of course. The *Cruising Guide to Newfoundland*, 2012 edition, speaks of a sublime bay with a good landing spot for the dinghy, indicated by an old lobster pot – and I'll be damned if it's not still there! With pain in our hearts we raise the anchor at noon the next day and sail to our next anchorage, Garia Bay, late in the afternoon. Again the well-known ritual, 'We will anchor here, oh see, there, oh there it is beautiful ...' and so we spend quite some time deciding on a place for the night. It is completely unnecessary, because wherever we lower the anchor it is equally beautiful, if not more beautiful, until the most beautiful place...



Minke whales between Garia Bay and Rose Blanche

Unlike many other ocean sailors, we have never seen whales. I am not waiting for such an animal to suddenly raise its head next to the boat and shout, 'Hi, I'm Wheelie' (it would be the fright of your life) but we still wonder why 'they' get to see them and we don't. We are rewarded for the long wait on our trip from Garia Bay to Rose Blanche. First a bit of spraying, and then a black monster waving up and down very slowly – what an animal, certainly as large as *Livingstone*. As a precaution I retract the keel, because our black underwater shapes are a bit alike and I don't want to be jumped. One moment they are there and the next they are gone and the sea is empty and flat again. Business as usual for us.

The weather in Newfoundland is already in autumn mode. When we arrive at Rose Blanche we find a super place in the town harbour in the middle of the settlement (it is no more than that). We are very lucky because a few fishermen are cleaning cod, slicing up the fish with razor-sharp knives. They ask if we also like to fish. 'Yes, but we are not that successful' appears to be a good answer as, when all the fish guts have been cleaned

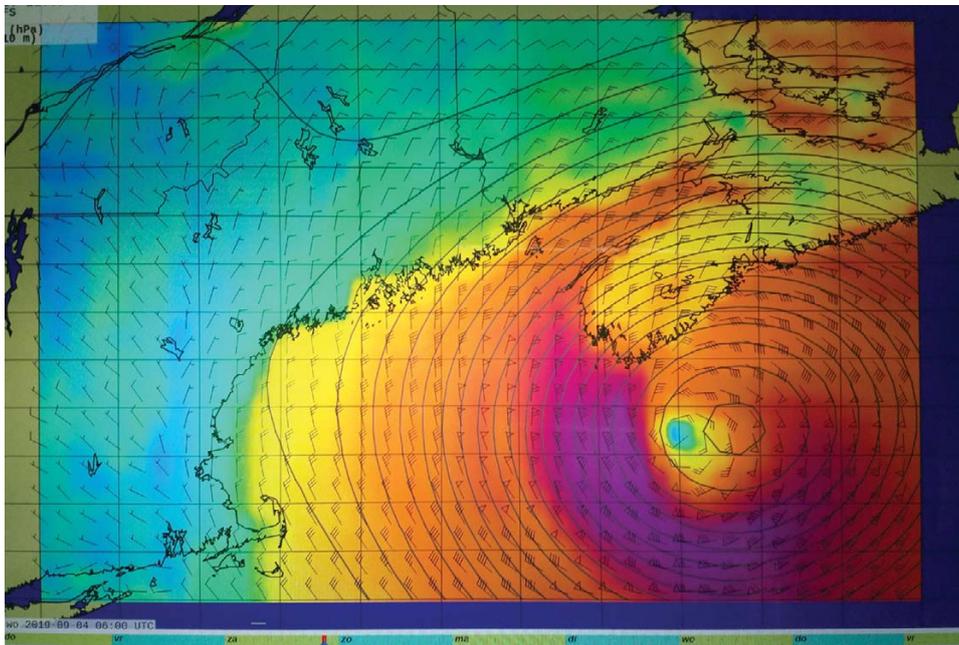
up, a kilo of filleted cod is brought to our boat with the advice to first let the fish lie for a day. Next day there are



Stormy weather seen from the lighthouse at Rose Blanche

force 9 Beaufort winds (± 45 knots) outside but we hardly notice them. It's an ideal day to walk to the lighthouse via the mountain paths. With difficulty we keep going, glad we are not at sea now. What a wild sea and what a wind – salty from the spray we return.

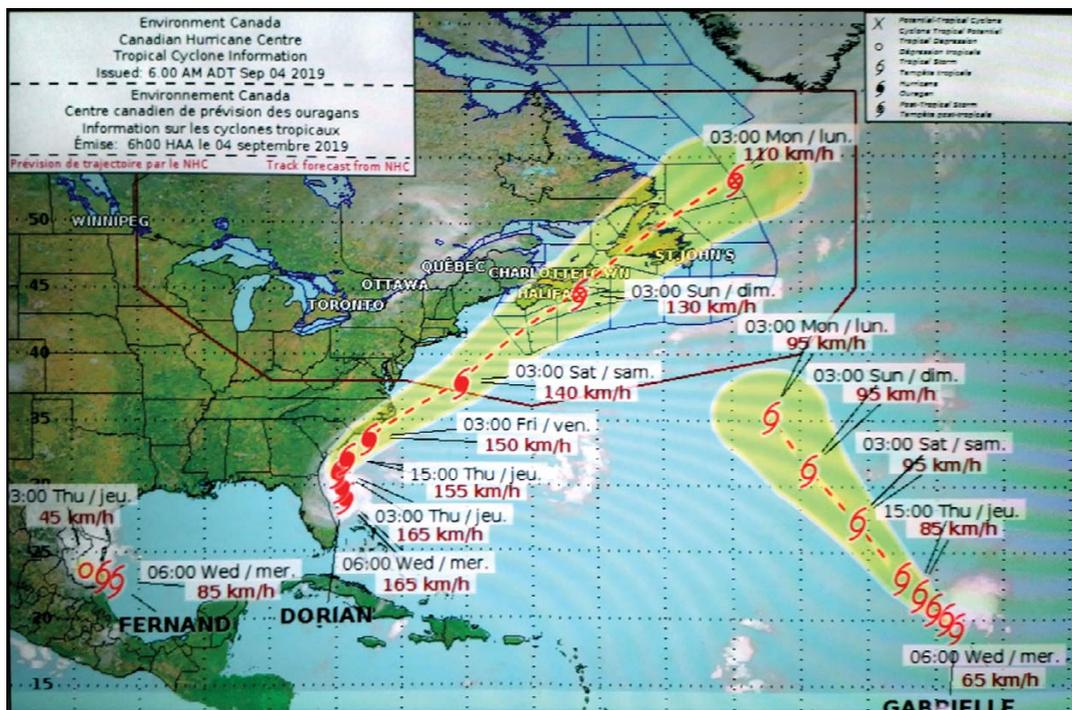
There is no mobile internet in Rose Blanche, but the town office provides a solution because staying connected to the world is nice and it's important to have an up-to-date forecast every day. We just had one storm and now, courtesy of the Canadian Hurricane Centre, we see Tropical Storm *Erin* approaching. We are so well sheltered that we decide to stay right there, so have time to explore the area further. Fortunately it is not too bad because at the last minute *Erin* decides to turn away. We sit and enjoy the sun in the cockpit – so much for the predicted rain and wind.



Tropical Storm Erin, as forecast by the Canadian Hurricane Centre

When *Erin* arrives we remain comfortable, but with the approach of Hurricane *Dorian* it is important to leave Newfoundland quickly*. Normally you never sail towards a storm, but now we have to because the south coast, where we are, will be hit hard and the only option is to go south. In 2½ days we are in Halifax, but once there we decide to continue to Shelburne on the southeast side of Nova Scotia, and sail on to the US from there. It is like the calm before the storm, because we have to use the engine the whole way – 19 hours in thick fog – and in the meantime *Dorian* is getting closer.

* Hurricanes and Tropical Storms are named alphabetically, but in this case Tropical Storm *Erin* (duration four days: 26th–29th August) reached the northern US and Canada more than a week before Hurricane *Dorian* (duration 15 days: 24th August until 7th September). See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Atlantic_hurricane_season.



Hurricane Dorian, 24 hours before the eye came over us

The new weather report that we get in Shelburne makes us decide to return to Halifax. The crossing to the US gives too many uncertainties, Shelburne has too little shelter, and the course of *Dorian* indicates that it will bend further away from the coast of Nova Scotia, which means less wind in Halifax. Although *Dorian* is heading north

The Northwest Arm of Halifax Harbour at the height of Hurricane Dorian



so are we, so we have a day in Halifax to prepare the boat for the storm. It's all hands on deck, because in the time that we've sailed to Halifax *Dorian* goes a step further and shifts its course back to the coast. We even see the eye coming right over Halifax. We can do nothing except make the boat as bare as possible to reduce windage and find a good spot. Then we can only sit and wait. The rain is splashing on the deck, the wind is howling through the rigging and we even have to hold on because we are swaying so much.

Suddenly it is quiet – the eye – and we can take a quick look outside to see how things are looking. Incredible! But just as fast as the wind decreased it starts to roar again, but from the opposite direction, and it's back to sitting and waiting. We try to play a game of Rummikub* but the tiles fly off the table, we try to read something but that's not easy either, so we just keep 'chilling' because the noise is deafening. We listen to the Halifax radio station, appropriately named Breeze, where they constantly repeat that this is the strongest hurricane since *Juan* in 2003, which caused a lot of damage here. Back when it was a category 5 hurricane *Dorian* stayed in the Bahamas for more than a day, but here in Halifax (meanwhile reduced to category 1, fortunately) it moves very fast and after our anchor watch we can go to sleep late at night. The wind is 'only' blowing force 6–7, but for us it feels like it's flat calm.

We went through a hurricane. Are we proud of that? No, no way – it is disappointing that we were not able to avoid it. What we feel good about is that we took all precautions (it was a bit of work) to weather the hurricane as well as possible. I can tell you that it was just not fun ... and we will never know who would have won the Rummikub.

* Rummikub is a tile-based game for two to four players, combining elements of the card game rummy and mahjong.

