

A BRITTANY CRUISE ‘OOPB’ Mike and Helen Norris

(Mike and Helen have been frequent contributors to Flying Fish over the past five years. Unfortunately Mike's recall to hospital in January 2015 ruled out their plans to spend the summer cruising from Portugal to Greece in their 37ft ketch Island Drifter, so they went for the next best thing...

For those unfamiliar with the acronym, OOPB stands for 'on other people's boats'.)

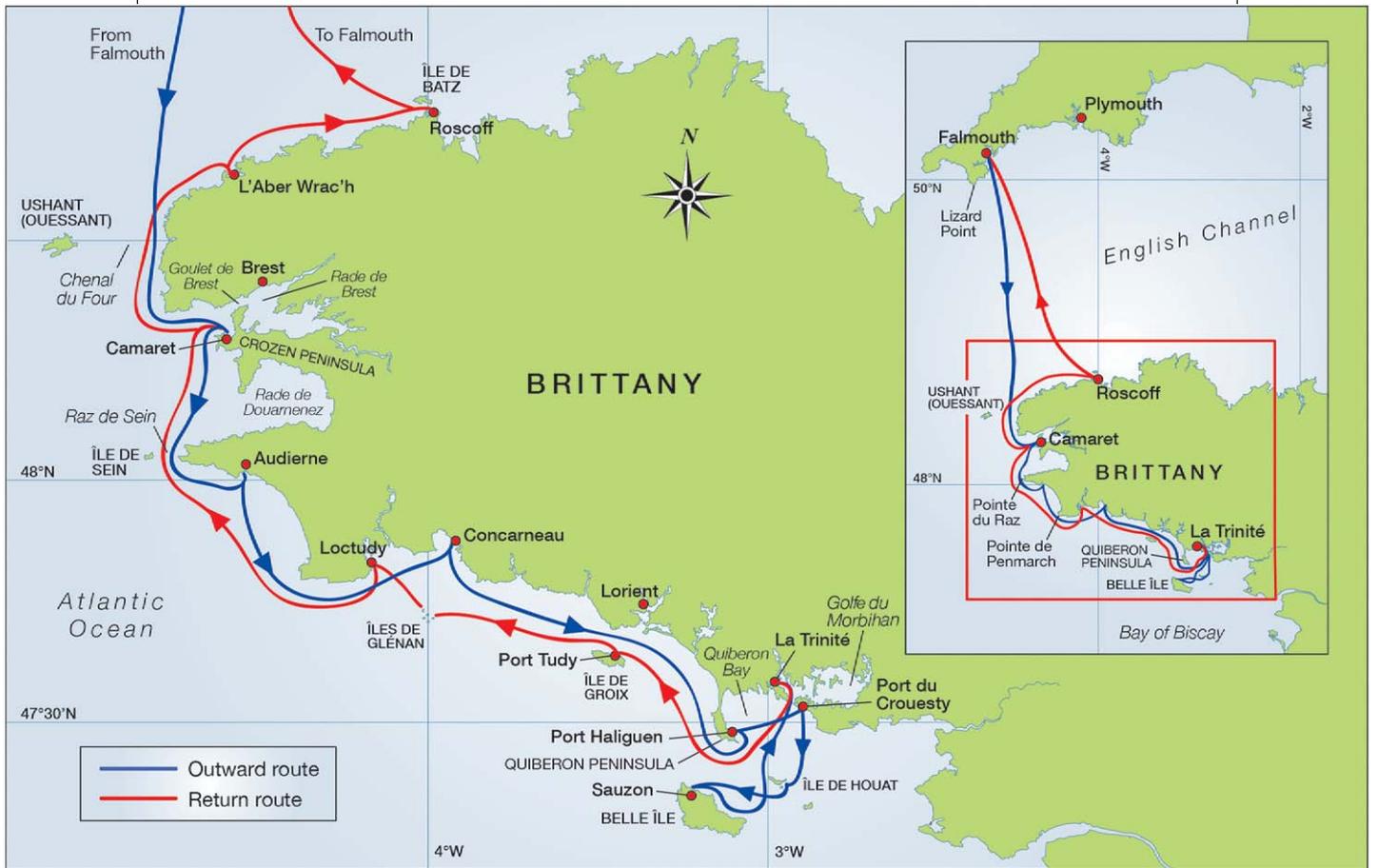
Having left *Island Drifter* in Portugal for the summer, we were easily persuaded to join friends Alan and Lynn for a cruise of northwest Brittany in July. We first met them in the Caribbean in 2000, when they were chartering, but soon after that they bought *Bucks Eagle*, a 34ft Sadler, which they now keep in Falmouth. We have cruised on each other's boats several times.

We joined them in Falmouth on Monday 6 July, gave Tuesday a miss as our departure date in view of the 25 knot southwesterlies, and finally left on Wednesday after a 'traditional' pasty and baked bean lunch. We had a good crossing of the Western Approaches in 16 knots from the west-northwest, and even spent the second half of the passage de-powering the sails to avoid arriving too early at the Chenal du Four tidal race. Our passage through the Chenal and across the Goulet de Brest to Camaret was in consequence uneventful. On arrival at the visitors' marina we secured on the inside of the large wave-breaking outer pontoon. In total our 120 mile passage had taken 25 hours.

The town of Camaret is near the western extreme of the Crozon peninsula, which separates the Rades de Brest and Douarnenez, and is a 'traditional' stop-over point for yachts passing through the Chenal du Four and Raz de Sein. An attractive old fishing port, it has successfully transformed itself into a boating and tourist centre. Next day we hiked eight miles around the spectacular Crozon peninsula on the GR34 coastal path.

Camaret's well-protected harbour, seen from the Crozon peninsula







**Traditional Breton
cakes laden with
calories – delicious!**

Audierne

On Saturday we left Camaret, and sailed in light airs south to and through the Raz to Audierne. Again, having ensured that we reached the tidal gate of the Raz at slack water, we had an uneventful passage through this otherwise difficult area.

In Audierne we moored on one of the

30 visitors' buoys off Ste-Evette, where we enjoyed a pleasant, sunny afternoon with a clear blue sky and light breeze. We didn't go up the river to Audierne itself because access is only possible 1½ hours either side of high water and it would have restricted our departure the following morning. On arrival we discovered that the batteries – which did not appear to have been holding their charge – were very hot. Later, when they'd cooled down, we disconnected and cleaned up the terminal connections in the vain hope that that would solve the problem.

Concarneau

We left next day, Sunday 12 July, for the 39 mile passage to Concarneau in a 15 knot breeze, initially on a broad reach and subsequently a run. We chose to pull into Concarneau because the write-up in the pilot book suggested that the town had good support services for yachts.

***A balloon-seller
celebrates Bastille
Day with Mike***



The old citadel of Concarneau, adjacent to the marina, is on a small island connected to the mainland by a drawbridge. Within its massive defensive walls is a maze of beautifully preserved little streets, lined with tourist shops, bars and restaurants. The town itself is a busy fishing and leisure port. Along with most other Breton towns it claims to be the birthplace of the Kouign Amann – a high-calorie cake of butter, sugar and flour.

Since the next day was Bastille Day and therefore a major public holiday, we were not optimistic about solving our battery and charging problems. To our surprise, however, we found a local electronic engineer prepared to help. After looking over the system he sourced and fitted new batteries, re-checked the charging system and gave us the thumbs-up. That evening we attended the start of the local Bastille Day celebrations. At the *poissonnade* (fish festival) we sat at one of the communal trestle tables and enjoyed *moules et frites* washed down with local cider, before attending a *Bal Populaire* (concert) in the town square followed by a magnificent firework display on the end of one of the quays.

Port Haliguen

On Tuesday 14th, with the 55 mile passage to Port Haliguen ahead of us, we were off early but ended up motor-sailing in light airs most of the way. The good news, however, was that this allowed us to check the charging systems and batteries, both of which worked well. On arrival we hauled Alan up the mast to repair the wind instruments, which were giving false readings due probably to water ingress and corrosion at the mast connection.

Port Haliguen lies on the east coast of the Quiberon peninsula which protects the bay itself. It is one of three very large marinas in the bay, and has good services and facilities. The open-air market in the small fishing and holiday village surrounding the marina was one of the best we've been to. Today Quiberon Bay is a major sailing area. In 1759, however, during the Seven Years War, the British fleet under Admiral Hawke chased its French counterpart into the Bay and, in what became known as the Battle of Quiberon Bay, destroyed most of the French ships. This turned out to be a major turning point in the war.



Alan repairing the wind instruments

Port du Crouesty

Next day, Wednesday 15th, we crossed Quiberon Bay to Port du Crouesty, a huge six-basin marina with 1400 berths. A holiday village has grown up around the marina and local beaches, which supports the bars, restaurants, tourist shops and supermarket in the area. Port du Crouesty lies some two miles from the entrance to the Golfe du Morbihan – 50 square miles of shallow, sheltered waters with deeper channels, fast tidal



Market day in Port Haliguen

streams and plenty of counter-currents – which unfortunately we did not have time to include on this cruise.

Île de Houat

On Saturday 18th we sailed on a beam reach back around the southern end of the Quiberon peninsula to the Île de Houat. There we anchored in sand off Treac'h Gourhed, said to be one of the best bays in Brittany. It is famous among sailors for its

'pyjama parties', which occur when the fickle *Vent Solaire* (a northeast land breeze) blows hard at night and those whose anchors have failed to dig in properly have to leave at speed to avoid ending up on a lee shore.



Town square and hall,
Port St Gildas,
Île de Houat

After lunch we inflated the dinghy and rowed ashore to look around. The attractive old little ferry and local boat harbour of Port St Gildas on the opposite side of the peninsula was a ten-minute walk away. Today a pleasant holiday village has grown up around the port. Although it blew hard later, our anchor remained well bedded in and we had a comfortable night.

Belle Île

Next day we enjoyed a good sail for the 14 miles to Sauzon on the northeast coast of Belle Île, the largest of the Breton islands. It is a pretty little town, but its inner harbours dry out, at least partially, other than in isolated pools and channels. Since we wanted to leave before high water next morning we took one of the deep-water visitors' buoys outside the harbour, well tucked in behind a protective headland.



Deep-water moorings outside Sauzon harbour. Bucks Eagle is one in from the left

Ten miles long and five wide, Belle Île has many holiday homes and lets and encourages hiking, cycling and boating. There is one other harbour, Le Palais, a bustling ferry port and tourist town, plus six reasonable anchorages. Ster Wenn, a beautiful fjord-like inlet on the northwest corner, is rated by many as the most attractive anchorage in France.

La Trinité

We left early next morning and had an excellent sail along the coast of Belle Île, then around the Quiberon peninsula (again) and across the Bay to La Trinité – a flourishing sailing and oyster centre to the west of the Golfe du Morbihan. The area is famous for



Alignements at Le Mézec near Carnac

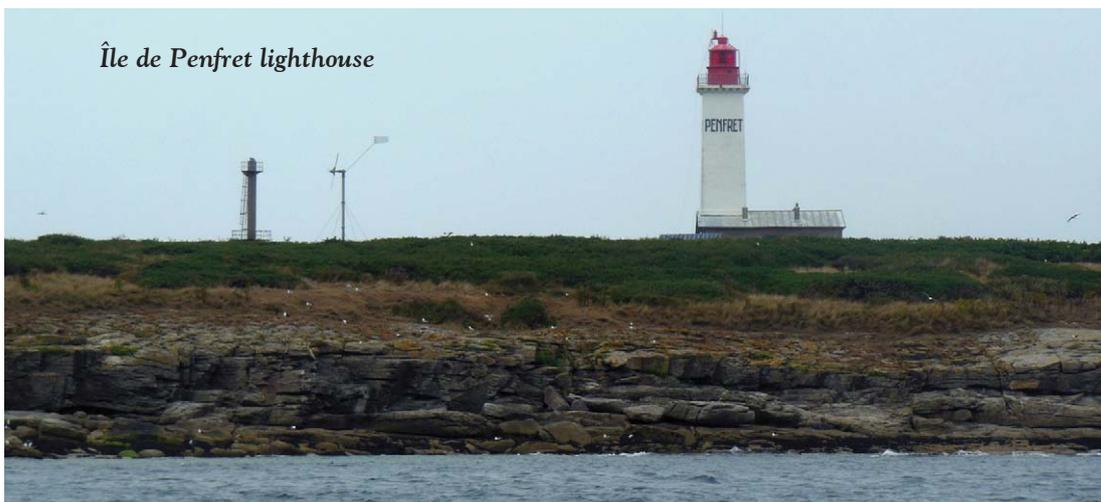
its large number of menhirs, long mounds, stone circles, passage graves and *alignements*, erected around 5000 years ago during the Neolithic period. We visited the *alignement* at Le Mézec, near Carnac, which is more than a kilometre long with twelve rows of stones laid out between two enclosures. Like Stonehenge, the *alignements* are believed to have been constructed for religious or astronomical purposes.

Île de Groix and Îles de Glenan

At 0500 on Tuesday 21st we started our return passage to the UK with an enjoyable 38 mile beat to Port Tudy on the Île de Groix, which lies 8 miles southwest of Lorient. Boats raft-up fore and aft on large buoys in the outer harbour. Although it was relatively empty when we arrived, it soon filled up and by tea time you could walk across the raft of boats to any of the three harbour walls.

We departed from the middle of our raft in Port Tudy at 0900, causing no more chaos to our French neighbours – who had been forewarned – than is normal in such circumstances! Yet again we had an excellent beat for the 20 mile sail northwest to the

Île de Penfret lighthouse





Dawn breaking over Île de Loctudy

Îles de Glenan, 10 miles south of the Benodet peninsula. Visibility during the passage was down to less than 200m at times, but with a chart plotter, radar and AIS this did not prove a problem. We finally anchored in the small bay on the east of the Île de Penfret (the most easterly of the Îles), just south of its famous lighthouse and well sheltered from the westerly winds forecast for overnight. On a good day – or as good as you can get in South Brittany – the islands’ beaches are said to be similar to those in the Caribbean, but on a misty day with poor visibility and rain it was more like anchoring off an island in western Scotland! Its main attraction was its splendid isolation.

Loctudy

Before leaving next morning we noted, as part of our engine check, that the saltwater filter was full of weed. We couldn’t get the Perspex filter cap off, and were not prepared to risk breaking it while away from any support services, so took the alternative risk of motoring slowly in zero wind the 15 miles across the Benodet Bay to Loctudy, watching the water filter and engine temperature gauge like a hawk.

*Alan and Mike
enjoying oysters and
wine in Loctudy*





Lighthouses on a calm day at the Raz due Sein

Loctudy turned out to be a pleasant combination of active fishing port and yachting centre. The marina, surprisingly, had two excellent chandleries, in one of which we were amazed to find an identical saltwater filter to that in *Bucks Eagle*, so we simply purchased it and replaced it on the boat. The highlight of our visit, however, was the dozen very large Grade 1 oysters that we bought in the market – for less than 40p each. Alan and Mike enjoyed them on board as a starter, washed down by a bottle of chilled white wine.

Camaret and L'Aber Wrac'h

We left Loctudy early on Wednesday 22nd for the 57 mile passage north to Camaret. We had planned to stop in Audierne, again on a buoy, but were becoming concerned by a nasty-looking low which was expected in the Western Approaches by the weekend. So we decided, 40 miles into the passage, to give Audierne a miss and push straight on through the Raz to Camaret since, fortuitously, the tidal gate was in our favour.

Bucks Eagle rafted against large, black Trintella 'fender'



Our departure from Camaret for the 32 mile passage to L'Aber Wrac'h was also timed to catch the start of the north-going tide, this time at the southern end of the Chenal du Four. L'Aber Wrac'h is located in a deep-water estuary on the western extremity of Northern Brittany, and has long been a popular staging post for yachts going south towards the Raz de Sein or Biscay, or those returning north through the Chenal du Four. There we rafted up against *Heavy Metal*, a 60ft Trintella, and, with such a large 'fender', had a relatively comfortable night even though it was a bit windy.

Roscoff

We left L'Aber Wrac'h at dawn on Friday 24th to catch the strong six-hour tide for the 37 miles northeast along the rocky North Brittany coast to Roscoff. It poured (and poured) with rain all day, but we had a fast reach in force 5 all the way. Roscoff is a major ferry port, which connects Brittany and France with Plymouth and Ireland. Visiting yachts no longer have to dry out in the Vieux Port, following the recent completion of a modern, 670-berth deepwater marina with excellent facilities and support services.

When approaching the town its austere granite buildings, dominated by a strangely-shaped Renaissance church tower, appear to rise out of the flat and featureless coast. The region has specialised in onion cultivation since the 17th century – onion sellers, known as 'Onion Johnnies', used to travel to Britain with bicycles laden with strings of onions, which they sold in the street and from door to door.



Roscoff's famous onions drying in the sun

Next day we caught a *vedette* (small ferry) to the Île de Batz, a mile off Roscoff's headland. The *Daily Telegraph* has described the island as a 'hidden gem' – its beaches are fine white sand and inland there are acres of potatoes, onions, shallots and fennel, grown in small hedged fields.

Since the forecast made it plain that the weather would soon start to deteriorate, we decided to depart immediately after supper that evening and make use of the final small weather window. This indicated that a force 3 would increase to 'no more than force 6' over the latter part of our 97 mile passage to Falmouth.

After sailing for ten hours, the B Watch (Mike and Lynn) were woken by the A Team who were running fast downwind with too much sail, having been hit by a 38



One of the many superb beaches on Île de Batz

knot (force 8) squall. After dropping the sails we lay hove-to for the next six hours and, in negligible visibility, monitored the AIS and radar and communicated by VHF with approaching vessels. Earlier in the gale, when we were taking down the sails, we experienced lightning and thunder immediately overhead. No damage appeared to have been done, but we believe we were in fact struck as a large blue flash crossed the cockpit and hit Lynn's arm, which ached and tingled for the next twelve hours or so.

Once the gale started to abate we raised a spitfire jib and sailed on it for the rest of the way to the Falmouth estuary – most of the time in the top end of a force 6–7. On the way we got caught by a rogue wave that partially flattened us, filled the cockpit and dumped a fair quantity of water below – we were changing watch at the time so the washboard was out. Helen (yet again) proved the value of keeping clipped on until well inside the boat, being caught midway and flung out into the guard rails. Alan, already below, ended up accelerating across the saloon and head butting the VHF.

On entering Falmouth estuary we turned the engine on for the first time since leaving Roscoff. It soon started to stutter and reduce in power, probably due to fuel starvation caused by dirt from the sides of the fuel tank being shaken free in the rough conditions and partially blocking the filters. So we sailed as far as we could, before coaxing the engine with its ever-decreasing revs – but with a flood tide in our favour – up the remaining mile or so of river to Falmouth Marina. We arrived at 0400, toasted Neptune, the boat and ourselves, and turned in.

Our cruise had taken 21 days, covered 619 miles, and visited 15 ports, marinas or anchorages. An enjoyable and interesting summer cruise on 'OOPB'.

