

After the break

Speedwell in Limfjord

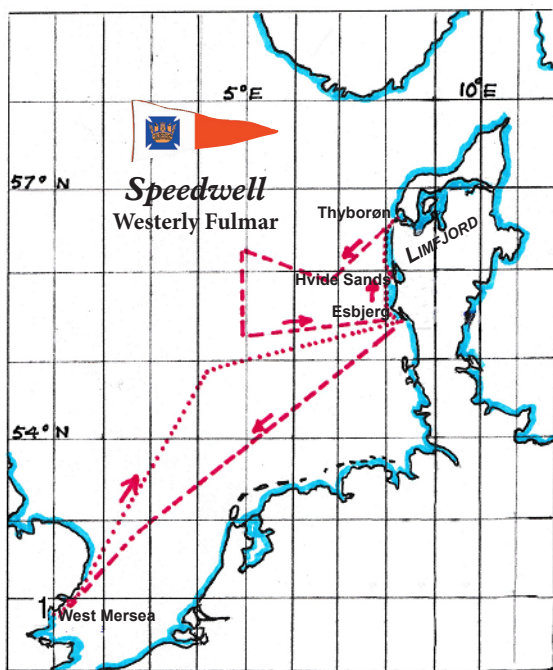
Chris Hamblin

The plan was for a leisurely tour of the Skagerrak, the Kattegat and the Baltic, initially with my old friend John. I have to say that in the 49 years I have known him, he still has not learnt anything at all about boat-handling, sail-trimming, chart-reading, knot-tying or navigation. He is, on the other hand, very good company and a reliable all-weather cook.

Not long before our departure from West Mersea, I lost my wallet. The bank cancelled my cards, but could not get the replacements before I sailed, nor could they send them to a bank abroad for me to collect. The cards could only be sent to my home address. Another friend, Peter, who was intending to join me in southern Norway, agreed to collect them from my wife Jill, and bring them with him. So far, so good.

John and I sailed up the coast from Mersea on 26 May, spent the night on the Harwich town pontoon and next morning called into Shotley Marina for bunkering.

We were two days out when *Speedwell* suddenly gybed. Seawater had entered the Autohelm and it had stopped working. The prospect of hand-steering downwind for a couple of hundred miles in a lumpy sea was unattractive, so we diverted to Esbjerg. Whenever I was watching him during this detour, John's steering appeared to be chaotic, which confirmed





Esbjerg - Restaurant and SC behind lightship museum

me in my view that gybes would have been frequent on a long downwind course. On the other hand, when I plotted his mean CMGs on the chart, they were immaculate – far better than mine.

We arrived late at night, found a vacant pontoon berth and had a midnight feast. Next morning we were greeted warmly by the

sailing club's duty harbour-master. He showed us the honesty box for payment of dues, lent us a key to the clubhouse, told us the wifi password and gave us a lift into town for shopping.

I emailed Peter to make new arrangements for meeting, as *Speedwell* was now in Denmark rather than Norway. Then over lunch, John said, 'I think I'll go home tomorrow. I'll join you for the return trip.' He took a taxi to Billund airport instead of the bus and was charged £100. Ryanair charged even more because he was a last-minute buyer and needed help with the Danish for the online check-in.

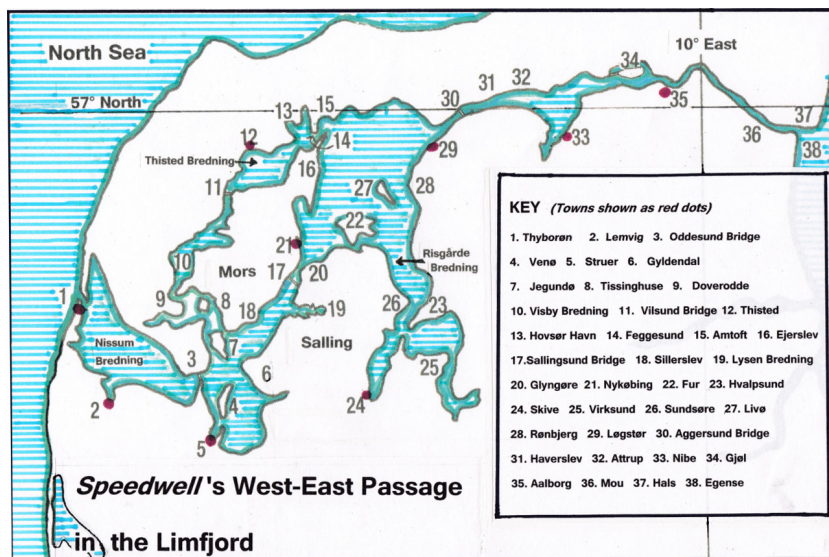
After John had left, Peter replied to say he would not be joining me after all. He returned my new bank cards to Jill, who sent them on by courier at considerable expense. A day later she found my lost wallet, half-hidden by a pot plant on the hall table.

I ordered a new Tillerpilot, but found it would need some surgery to fit the power supply and then compass, response rate and sea-state would need to be calibrated. Motoring slowly in big circles in the Esbjerg fairway seemed unwise, so I gave up and put to sea, heading north for Thyborøn.

Out at sea, the Tillerpilot initiated a gratuitous swerve and *Speedwell* gybed. The mainsheet threw me across the cockpit, breaking several of my ribs. Rather than plug on to Thyborøn, I headed for Hvide Sande, some 40nm closer, and arrived by 2000. I was starting to rethink my cruise plan.

Hvide Sande is a fishing port on a narrow strip of land between the North Sea and a large, shallow lagoon called Ringkøbing Fjord. A huge sluice controls the water level in the fjord and the drainage from 8% of Denmark's landmass. There are six yacht harbours in the fjord, but only two are for sea-going yachts. Most of the fjord is less than 0.5m deep.

Two days later I left for Thyborøn, under genoa alone. Hoisting the mainsail would have been too painful. Thyborøn is on the North Sea, but



the harbour entrance lies within the Limfjord, a shallow seaway running through Jutland, connecting the North Sea and the Kattegat. The western half of the fjord is effectively a series of wide lakes called *brednings* (broads).

After two nights and a day in Thyborøn, I motored 12nm in brilliant sunshine and a flat calm to the little town of Lemvig, which lies at the head of a bay, also called Lemvig, on the south shore of the fjord. The old harbour wall was destroyed by storms and the harbour is now being enlarged.

The town still has many old buildings, including a very pretty church with a votive sailing ship model hanging from the ceiling. Nobody seemed to know where I could get wifi, but two charming young



women on roller skates suggested the public library. I spent a couple of rewarding hours in a little sculpture garden and the adjacent town museum, which contained much material of nautical interest. There were some moving photographs of wrecked sailing ships, which had a special resonance for me.

From Lemvig, my track was to the Oddesund bridge at the eastern end of Nissum Bredning and then south to the little harbour on the west of Venø island. Inside the harbour, I found the breeze a problem and the unroped box berths unwelcoming. Having dislodged my pulpit navigation light and snapped my ensign staff, I decided to retreat. On her way out, well within the marked channel, *Speedwell* hit the bottom but bounced free. It had been a painful experience in several ways.

The south of the island is a spit that goes to within 200m of the mainland shore. A car ferry shuttles to and fro across this gap. Southwest of this, the bredning extends into a bay with the town of Struer at its head. I secured to a yellow buoy near the western shore and had a quiet night, helped by a hefty dose of Ibuprofen. Printed on the buoy was the legend 'KUN FOR MEDLEMMER' (Members only), meaning members of the Dansk Sejlunion. Danish yachtsmen have told me that nobody is likely to complain if a foreign yacht is seen lying on such moorings. In the Limfjord, these buoys are mostly in place between 1 April and 15 November. The same applies to many small harbour approach buoys.

Before approaching Struer I succeeded in calibrating the Tillerpilot compass, but not the response rate. In Struer with some discomfort, I secured *Speedwell* in one of the few vacant box berths before noticing the red 'Private Mooring' plate on the jetty.

'Don't worry,' I was told, 'the owners have gone away for a week.'

At 1300 next day the berth owners arrived in their large motor yacht. They insisted that I should stay in their berth as long as I needed and while I was there, use their pre-paid electricity supply. They then moored in a nearby box that I had avoided because it was too wide and had no lines running from the poles to the shore.

In the public library, I found a tourist booklet describing all the little yacht harbours in the Limfjord. I decided to have a more a gentle cruise with no hoisting of the mainsail or hauling the anchor, just a tour of the Limfjord harbours. Later, I bought a copy of Komma's *Havnelods*, an excellent harbour guide giving plans and notes for over 1000 harbours in Denmark, Sweden, Baltic Germany and Poland.

Much of the fjord is quite shallow and charted depths are not reliable. The fjord is virtually tideless, but a fresh wind blowing in the same direction for a few days can alter depths by a metre or more. This made me very cautious about which harbours to enter.

My eastward journey through the fjord took in as many harbours as possible. By the time *Speedwell* had reached the east end of the fjord, I had stayed for one or more nights in sixteen harbours, entered and briefly inspected another seven, approached but turned away from a further four, and picked up mooring buoys in two other locations.

The little rural yacht harbours are generally run by local yacht clubs

with financial assistance from the government. They are nearly all set in grassy areas and close by there is often a small camping and caravan site. Sometimes there are a few smart holiday houses. Usually there is a small store selling groceries and household items. The harbour office building usually incorporates a shower, lavatory and laundry facilities, and there are always good waste disposal facilities, but not always fuel pumps. These harbours are invariably clean, well-maintained and attractive. My mooring fees ranged from DK100-150 (about £10-15) per night.

After leaving Struer I sailed to Gyldendal but did not enter it because of its shallow approach and the channel buoys were not clear. A few miles further north lay Jegindø, which was an island until 1916 when a causeway was built. The harbour here is in two parts; fishing boats go in the south part, but there are yachts in both. I was moored against the north side of the centre wall with water and electricity close at hand.

At the head of the harbour is the Skipperhuis, with a bar, restaurant and the usual amenities. Next to it is a small fishery museum. There is a



Traditional 'sprittrier' at Jegindø

bronze statue of a Limfjord fisherman nearby. He looks small, thin and old. There were several traditional open sailing boats in the harbour, replicas of the smallest fjord fishing boats with rather ungainly square-headed spritsail and a jib. I stayed in Jegindø for several enjoyable days.

One evening, *Queen Mary* berthed astern of me under sail. She was 6 metres LOA. The owner, aged 68, told me that the boat was all he owned apart from a few things stored in a garage. Over coffee and cake he examined my charts of the fjord, making a few notes of possible anchorages. He was apparently on his way back to the West Indies, of which he had fond memories. When he left next morning I gave him some cans of food, chocolate and a fruitcake, which he gravely accepted.

My next port of call was Tissinghuse, on the south-west coast of Mors, but it looked small, crowded and unattractive, so I followed the channel to Doverodde. I was helped with my lines there by the crew of a large Danish yacht. I in turn immediately helped a German yacht berthing astern of me. While I did so, a member of their crew nipped ashore and bagged the only remaining electricity power point, beside which I had moored.

Doverodde is pleasant enough, but I did not feel inclined to stay long. Apart from the harbour office building, which houses the lavatories and showers, there is a restaurant, which was closed, and there are allegedly fine views from the top of a harbour-side grain silo.

I left late the following morning under sail, en route for Thisted. The wind died within minutes. Apart from the engine noise, it was a peaceful journey northward to Vilsund bridge. On the south side of the bridge there is a small craft harbour, but it is apparently private. There was no reply from the bridgekeeper to my VHF greeting, but the bridge opened ten minutes later.

It was now a straight course of about $4\frac{1}{2}$ nm to Thisted, where I found a convenient berth alongside the outer pontoon. Facilities here are good. Dues are paid at the Shell station beyond the head of the marina. Information leaflets are available there too, but they are printed only in



Classic beauty in Thisted

Danish and German. This is a very likeable town, with many attractive old streets. The fact that it rained persistently next day did not deter me from exploring it.

The day after that was glorious and although there was no wind for sailing, I was perfectly happy to motor gently to the eastern end of Thisted Bredning. A visitors' buoy was shown on the chart in a bay called Hovsør Havn. It was an idyllic spot, but the sun was scorching, so after a

lunch I left for the narrows at Feggesund. Here, it is very shoal in parts and my depth alarm was going off constantly. At the north-east corner of Mors is a long spit on the south side of the Sund. It runs north-east, pointing at the little harbour of Amtoft. This is a fishing harbour as well as a yacht harbour and the fishing boats use the two outer pontoons. I found a berth alongside a short transverse pontoon and paid my dues at the harbour shop, which also caters for the campers just beyond the harbour.

Strong winds were forecast for the next two days, so I was content to rest my ribs with gentle activities, such as laundry and a coastal walk. On the third day I woke up to sunshine and a gentle westerly breeze.

Next was Ejerslev, 6nm to the south, on the east coast of Mors. This is a beautiful little harbour with several alongside berths and if it had been the end of the day I would have been very happy to moor there,

but I had to press on. After a further 9nm reach down the coast, I was passing Nykøbing, where I had planned to spend the night, but it was still early afternoon. Leaving Glyngøre to port and passing under the lofty Sallingsund Bridge, *Speedwell* motor-sailed down Salling Sund under slowly increasing cloud. A cormorant surfaced close to starboard with a surprisingly large fish in its beak. Lining up the fish for swallowing appeared to be a tricky process.

I was heading for the little harbour of Sillerslev, six miles beyond the bridge, but I did not stop. Most of the berths were boxes, but a new pontoon has been built to provide a few alongside berths for visitor

On my way south I had noted that there was an interesting-looking branch off to the east, called Lysen Bredning. It was about 3 nm in length, narrowing sharply about half-way along, then opening out into a circular expanse of water about 1 nm in diameter, called Harre Vig. The chart showed two visitors' mooring buoys there. It looked rather intriguing. At the narrows, *Speedwell* crept in, often with only a few centimetres under her keels. Once inside Harre Vig, I decided not to approach the yellow DS buoys too closely as they were well inshore. On leaving, I thought I had found the line of deepest water through the narrows when the port keel hit the bottom. *Speedwell* pivoted so quickly on the grounded keel that I fell over in the cockpit. Getting *Speedwell* unstuck took several minutes.

After this little misadventure, *Speedwell* motored sedately northward and called in for a look at Glyngøre. It is an attractive harbour with some visitors' moorings alongside, but I really needed the shopping facilities of Nykøbing. It lies at the head of a well-buoyed channel and has a large marina in a harbour of several basins. After looking in vain for a berth alongside, I settled for a box berth on the outer pontoon, where there were most vacancies. I still had not grasped that the easiest box berths to enter are in fact those lying between two occupied berths. The harbour and shopping facilities here are good, as I discovered next day,



Nykøbing - Café Holman to the right

although I did not find the town very attractive. There is a very pleasant waterside eating place, Café Holman, within the marina.

After two nights in Nykøbing I left in light winds under high cloud, to look at Fur. This is regarded as one of the most beautiful islands in the

fjord. The harbour is delightful, with plenty of alongside berths and even rubber-sheathed posts. As *Speedwell* made her way eastward out of Fur Sund I was amused to see areas of dry land where the chart showed water. Fur lies at the northern end of a peninsula called Salling. The Limfjord stretches along the east side of Salling, initially as Risgårde Bredning, and then narrows into Hvalpsund before forking at the south. The little harbours of Sundsøre and Hvalpsund lie to the west and east respectively of the Hvalpsund narrows.

I decided to look at Hvalpsund on my way south and at Sundsøre on my return. Hvalpsund has two harbours 600 yards apart. The northern one is yet another attractive little yacht harbour, mostly set out with box berths, but with guest berths alongside transverse pontoons. The southern harbour is for fishing boats, with a ferry running across to Sundsøre.

From Hvalpsund it is about 9nm down the western fork to Skive Harbour, which is quite big and very smart. I found a good alongside berth at the northern end. There are two moderately expensive restaurants, but for general shopping it is necessary to go into town a mile away. The



Sculpture in Skive

town is not particularly attractive, but I found a good bookshop which also sold classical music CDs. The owner was very happy to discuss the contemporary literary scene and this made for a pleasant interlude.

After two nights in the marina *Speedwell* set off northward again,

to round the long, snake-like Jelse Odde before turning east and south into Lovns Bredning. The bredning narrows sharply at Virksund, where there is a road bridge with a lock to Hjarbækfjord. This little fjord has a small craft harbour at its head, but it is very shoal so I did not go there.

Crossing Lovns Bredning, a yacht approached fast under power from dead ahead. As I was under sail I held my course. We were definitely on a collision course, but I could not see anyone aboard, so when things were looking serious I altered course and waited to see what would happen. Seconds after we had passed, less than 30 feet apart, a smiling man appeared from down below, waved and called 'Hi!' Such insouciance!

Virksund harbour has three entrances. The wide southern entrance is for small boats, while the middle and northern ones both lead to deeper areas. I entered the northern one, but went for a box berth that was too

narrow. *Speedwell* became firmly stuck between the posts. Not wanting to draw attention to myself by revving the engine, I tried to free *Speedwell* from the embrace of the poles by leaning against them in a nonchalant sort of way. It didn't work. I had to resort to more painful physical effort.

Once *Speedwell* was secure in a more accommodating berth I invited Steffen, the yachtsman who had helped me moor her, for coffee. He was an electrical engineer who had once worked for Bang & Olufsen and had also worked in Greenland. He later invited me to have dinner with him and his wife, Grethe, at their house near Skive.

On my way north again, I stopped at Sundsøre Havn on the north side of a long spit. It is very small, but has alongside berths on its south wall, with the ferry berth on the north side. I left to go north again. The chart shows a narrow cut between the shore and Rotholm reef. The cut is buoyed at its southern end and would save a mile, so I decided to take it. *Speedwell* was clearly between the marker buoys when we went hard aground. It took several minutes of wriggling under full power before *Speedwell* came free.

Next, I explored a bay on the northeast corner of Fur, which is sheltered from northerly, westerly and southerly winds and has two strategically placed yellow buoys. Both were occupied so I set a course to clear the southern end of Liv Tap, a 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ nm long spit running south-east from Livø island. Once clear of the tip, I headed up the north side of the spit to look at Livø harbour. It was absolutely full, so I turned eastward to Rønbjerg.

Rønbjerg is well-sheltered and compact, with limited space for mooring alongside. I managed to park *Speedwell* just clear of a warning notice marking the turning space for the ferry. Its captain was said to be very aggressive if anyone infringed his space. The fish suppers available at the pier head had been warmly recommended, but I was too late. However, I was invited to join a group for coffee in the yacht club, where I was given some rather partisan advice about which harbours to avoid. My host pointed to the sites of my two recent groundings on the chart, asking, 'And did you go aground?' He had gone aground in exactly the same places.

From Rønbjerg I went due north for 4nm, to reach the very narrow dredged channel to Løgstør. It runs for about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ nm across Løgstør Grunde bank with a mean depth of about 1 metre. The channel has a nominal depth of 4 metres, but *Speedwell's* depth-sounder repeatedly indicated no water under the keel. A large old ketch came in close behind me and I asked the skipper whether she had hit the bottom at all. He said yes, several times, but her 80HP diesel had kept her moving.

Løgstør has a small yacht harbour. Next to it is the entrance to a canal running south for nearly 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ nm close to the shoreline. It was dug in the mid-1800s at the instigation of Frederik VII for shipping from the east to access Løgstør Bredning. After it was built, the canal lost its traffic, but its northern end is now a useful and attractive yacht harbour.

I found a good berth against the pontoon on the northwest side. That evening, two boats moored outside me. Next morning, I found that the owners had gone home for the week, leaving me to escape their shore lines and their power cables, led under *Speedwell's* guardrails, on my own.



Løgstør - former canal bailiff's cottages, now a museum

A narrow, curving channel runs north and east through the shallows from Løgstør to Aggersund Bridge, with a skiff harbour beside the bridge itself. Beyond the bridge, the Limfjord is mostly very shoal, with narrow channels running through it. The harbours of Haverslev and Attrup are both on the northern shore. To reach them you must leave the main channel and cross some shallows into a deeper area called Attrup Lo. The route is marked, but with so little clearance under my keels, I didn't try it.

Beyond Attrup, the fjord widens one last time before continuing in riverine form to Aalborg. To the south, is a shallow triangular bay called Nibe Bredning, on the east side of which is the town of Nibe. To the north is a larger semi-circular bay, Gjølbredning, with the island of Gjølb.

The approach to Nibe is a buoyed channel with a theoretical least depth of 2.5 metres. It was a serene and sunny afternoon when *Speedwell* entered harbour. There were several large pavilions nearby and loud bursts of music as sound technicians worked on their amplification systems. Did I want to spend the night next to a pop concert? Well, probably not. The real clincher was the smell. Everywhere there was a strong smell of sewage.

Next stop Gjølb, a pleasant harbour with a very helpful harbour-master, good facilities including an ice-cream parlour, an inn and a village shop within walking distance. Also, plenty of space for mooring alongside.



The kro (inn) at Gjølb Harbour

to the next one, called Skudehavnen. It had been recommended to me as a quiet spot, where you could lie against the back wall of the old harbour

In Aalborg a day later, I looked into Fjordparken, the first marina on the southern shore. As it was some distance from the city centre, I continued to

instead of going into the marina area proper. I did that, but soon realised that there were few water or power outlets. There are more and better facilities in the adjacent but very busy Vestre Bådhavn, where my ticket was equally valid, but I did not feel like moving again.

The passage through Aalborg and eastward to the Kattegat is obstructed by two bridges in the middle of town. The westerly one is a railway bridge, the easterly one a road bridge. Two trains kept me waiting for about 20 minutes, before the first bridge lifted. At the second, in company with several other yachts, I had to wait over 40 minutes, so I moored against the south bank. Three hours later, *Speedwell* was secured on a transverse pontoon in the little yacht harbour of Mou.

Payment of harbour dues turned out to be cash-only. I did not have enough Danish cash but the harbour-master explained that I



Speedwell in visitors' berth, Mou Harbour

could use a harbour bicycle to go into the village 1½ km away. When I asked for cash in the supermarket as advised, I found that their system rejected all my cards. Another customer, an Englishman living locally, directed me to the nearest bank, in a village about 9 km away. Unfortunately, he was one of those people who confuse left and right. At the first signpost I reached I discovered that I was now 13km from the bank. I spoke to a woman in her garden for directions and she immediately insisted on taking me in her car.

An inch of rain fell on the following day and there were white horses on the fjord. *Speedwell* stayed in harbour, but by late evening the wind was easing, the rain had stopped and I went for a walk. By 0720 next morning I was investigating the harbour at Hals, on the north shore of the Limfjord at its meeting point with the Kattegat. It was very crowded, probably because of the weather, so I crossed to the south shore and secured against the south-east wall of Egense harbour. It is beautifully maintained, but relatively expensive and again, cash-only. A ferry terminal nearby has frequent services across the fjord to Hals. That evening, I spent an hour or two in Hals, where I had a mediocre fish supper and an enjoyable, wide-ranging chat with two Scotsmen. The town itself, was not endearing.

Speedwell returned to Aalborg on 8th July and the following day I went by bus to the airport to meet John, who was rejoining me. It was gratifying to be told that we qualified for half-fares because we were so old. We had



Old Aalborg

a celebratory meal and took a taxi back, feeling suitably tired and geriatric.

Our journey back to Thyborøn took several days longer than expected, because of various engine problems. One of our repair stops was in Nykøbing, where I was again obliged to take a box berth. I decided to try out a new technique for leaving

the berth. On each side of the boat I deployed a short control line with a large karabiner at one end, the other end being cleated on deck. The karabiners were each clipped onto the post-to-pontoon warps of the box berth, between which *Speedwell* was lying. I explained to John that with the control lines taut, *Speedwell* could go astern in the box, once her shore lines had been released, without risk of her bow veering off to either side. I would then lift the stern lines off the posts, he would unclip the karabiners and away we would go.

I had just freed my stern lines when I realised that John had cast off both the control lines from the deck cleats and dropped them over the side. They were now under water, still attached to the box berth warps by their karabiners.

‘I had a feeling that I might have misunderstood you,’ he said.

We left Thyborøn for West Mersea in a near flat calm on 17 July. At 1350 we put a reef in the mainsail and at 1530, we put in another. The wind continued to rise and by 1900 it was veering. By 2100 the best COG we could make on that tack was just north of west, but I judged it better to hold on that course for a few hours in order to gain distance westward.

Next morning we tacked and headed south across a big sea but under a bright sky. At some point during the night, one of the sprayhood foot fastenings had been torn out of the deck, allowing the occasional head sea to splash through the gap and down the hatch. At the very end of that day, the second steering gear failure of the cruise occurred. A lurch and a bang, a sudden heel and there was *Speedwell*, genoa aback, heading the wrong way. The Tillerpilot was jammed and inoperable. West Mersea lay 287nm to windward, whereas Esbjerg would be 111nm on a broad reach....

We arrived in Esbjerg the following evening, with a young starling

hitch-hiker. I was sad when it left us, heading for Horns Rev wind farm.

During our post-arrival supper John said, 'I think I'll go home tomorrow. This is all taking longer than I had expected.' Next morning he was not in a very good mood, complaining that his shower had taken his money but would not work. Apparently he had not noticed that there was an on/off knob. He left most of his gear in a fo'c's'le locker, saying that he would collect it when *Speedwell* was back in England.

My presence was also required in England once I had a safe berth for a few weeks. I was back on 22 July, having been away for 59 days, but with the North Sea return passage still in prospect.

On Friday, 14 August I flew back to Denmark with two new TP32 Tillerpilots to make a solo passage back to Mersea. Next day there was a flat calm and I managed to calibrate both new Tillerpilots. *Speedwell* made slow progress out to sea against the tide. It was warm but misty with a lot of thin high cloud. Fat seals lay motionless on the sandbanks, with their hind flippers cocked up at an odd angle. In the water too, seals appeared to be in a state of lethargy, content just to watch us as we passed close by.

The wind stayed light until 2100, so *we* motor-sailed. My AIS screen was showing the shipping in the expected area when a large coaster passed within 300m, travelling fast. At no point did it appear on the AIS screen.

In patchy fog later that night, a large wind farm suddenly appeared in front of me. It was not shown on my supposedly up-to-date chart. I made a suitable course alteration.

Two days out from Esbjerg I felt a lurch and heard a crash from the cockpit. *Speedwell* had gone about and then gybed. The Tillerpilot was no longer working. This time, of course, I was able to fit the spare device immediately. *Speedwell* and I then had some good sailing until the evening, when the wind dropped and it began to rain. It continued to rain as we closed the Suffolk coast and it was still raining as we entered the Wallet. Halfway down the Wallet a strong headwind blew up, but we were carrying the flood and with more unashamed motor-sailing, reached our Salcott mooring by lunchtime, 70 hours out from Esbjerg.