

To Brittany with some Senior Moments

Cruising from the UK to Brittany

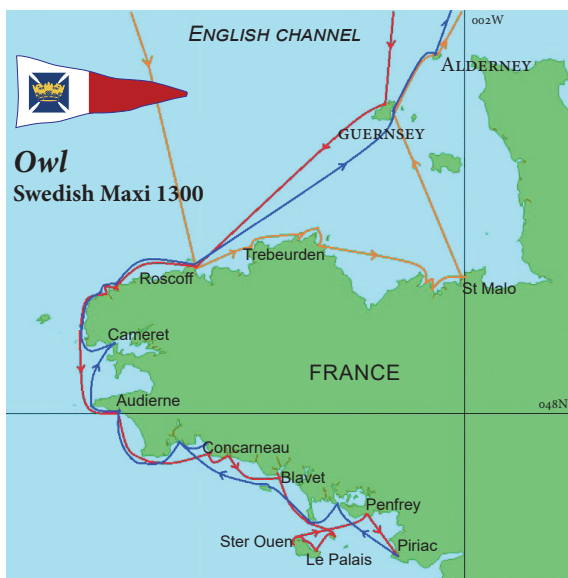
Peter Bruce



We bought the new *Owl*, a 2008 Swedish Maxi 1300, on 2 November 2021 and had a busy six months sorting her. She was fully electrified with Selden in mast furling and lithium batteries but with a host of things that needed to be attended to. At last most work had been done, the main item outstanding being the davits which were still on order. We did short sails to Poole, and in the Solent before a longer sail with friends between our two cruises to Brittany.

On 12 June we left Lymington for France via the West Country. We

stopped for the night at pleasant Portland Harbour. Two bottle nosed dolphins, Will and Harry now established there, made friends with us. They played together round our anchorage in the morning, then escorted us back to the harbour entrance when we left. At Salcombe I tried to leave the Royal Naval Sailing Association buoy by going ahead and got caught by the cross current onto the bows of the other two moored



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yachts - fortunately with no damage to either. The remedy was for the other two yachts to drop the mooring. We left bottles of wine with them later. It was my first senior moment of the voyage.

At Plymouth we picked up two delightful club friends who sailed with us to Trebeurden, via Roscoff for the British Vessel check in. While there we took the ferry to Île de Batz (pronounced Ba) and hired electric bicycles for an attractive island tour with nice gardens at the east end. This was a good decision. We had to stay longer than planned at Trebeurden through bad weather and, calamitously, our noble incoming new crew tested positive for Covid and had to return home. So just the two of us visited Treguier, Bréhat (where our exotic Ultra anchor held when others didn't), St Cast-le Guido, Île des Hébihens, St Malo via Le Grand Grenille channel, having a ride at St Malo on the new Middens wheel, then Guernsey, Alderney and home on 30 June across the Channel where Sandy spotted a marlin jump which we thought extraordinary. We had covered 696 miles since leaving Lymington. Good news at home the davits had arrived.

Owl rounding Cap Frehel, northern Brittany (photograph Pierrick Contin)



Our original plan had been to go Scotland in July but there comes a time in life to take the easier option, after all there were just two of us. I was in my eighties and Sandy in her seventies and so we decided on south Brittany. We left on 16 July, stopping at Grand Havre on the NW coast of Guernsey, an ideal anchorage in an easterly. Next day to Roscoff, where the tidal current was running south at about 2kts. We were allocated a berth with the stern facing the stream but were not quick enough with the stern line onto the short finger pontoon to prevent a bump on the neighbouring yacht when *Owl* slewed round. The nice German owner said the

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mark would easily polish out and we compensated him with a bottle of vintage champagne. We won't try to berth down tide again at Roscoff - friends say they anchor in the Île de Batz channel while waiting for the Roscoff current to slack. It was another senior moment but not the last.

On to L'Aber Benoît, via the Batz channel, where the overland south-easterly seemed as if it had been heated in a furnace. As it happened we never had quite such hot weather again. We spent two nights there on a buoy. We usually lasso a buoy before putting a combined rope and chain through the ring. Then ashore for a walk and to supplement supplies from the *supermarché*. We left in rain and fog but by the time we picked up a mooring at the St Evette mole the sun had come out. Next morning in the Audierne Bay we were delighted on the phone to hear the cheerful voice of John Macnamara (RCC) who was passing us, going north. Later we berthed alongside *Jacana* (RCC) in Concarneau on the hammerhead. We had French friends from Concarneau to dinner, Pascal and Ruth. This was an eight year relationship that developed when I borrowed a tool from Pascal. We were waiting for engine spares and Pascal and Ruth offered us some delightful alternatives while stuck in harbour.

Both *Owl* and *Jacana* sailed for the Îles des Glénan where we all went to dine aboard the immaculate *Reflection*, our last *Owl*, now owned by Richard and Ro Gatehouse. We spent three nights at the Glénans on a buoy, visiting Île Cigogne fort, the Île de Saint Nicolas restaurant Castrie Les Viviers and had sundry meals with Kitty and Simon van Hagen (RCC) in our respective boats. *Wingbeat* and *Avocet* (both RCC) were there but we didn't manage to speak. Back to Concarneau for water and to pick up Pascal who was going to join us for a day or two. Having taken *March Avec*, the town classic vessel on numerous outings, Pascal is a mine of local marine information. We berthed on the Bélon River where I went ashore with Pascal to walk the riverside path he'd used for fitness runs over the years. Then, in the morning to the lovely Blavet River - so quiet and beautiful. A yacht was alongside the Locguénolé hotel pontoon and the owner turned out to be the project manager for a complete hotel refurbishment, expected to last another year. On to Rade de Houat where there were well over a hundred yachts at anchor. We went ashore in the morning to shop and lunch and were advised that Houat is pronounced 'What'. In the afternoon we elected to go for a beach walk with David and Jill Southwood (RCC) who anchored nearby. On coming back to where we thought we'd left the dinghy ... there it was not. Only after a worrying two hours helped by kind French people were we reunited with our inflatable which may or may not have been borrowed. How pleased we were to see our 2.9m Excel which coped with the chop so much better than the French one that gave us a lift out. We made drinks with the Southwoods and invited one couple, who'd helped us with the dinghy affair, to breakfast and the other was well rewarded with wine. Subsequently we sailed for Sauzon where we were lucky to find a vacant buoy but had an uncomfortable night with the swell from the northerly wind coming round

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the corner. Next Le Palais Avant Port where we berthed alongside charming golf playing Austrian medics. In the morning we were awoken at 0530 by the hideous noise coming from the unloading of a gravel barge opposite. Le Palais, as ever, is fun, if noisy. Again much noise next morning but a little later at 0600.



Sandy outside Le Palais

The Austrians had spotted the Stêr Ouen inlet from the northern golf course and asked us about it. I'd first been there in *Gauntlet* in 1964 having been told about it by Adlard Coles. When we arrived in 1964 the sole occupant was a fishing boat with some kind of mechanical defect, judging by the hefty hammer blows we could hear. Our three girls were sent over for fish, armed with a bottle of whisky. They appeared an hour or so later, slightly sozzled, but with an abundance of seafood in the dinghy. Encouraged by such accounts, the Austrians accompanied us briefly to Stêr Ouen, where, as usual, we anchored on the west side. We were helped with our stern line to the east by the French



owner of the J24 *Bolero* whom we subsequently invited aboard *Owl* for drinks. From the dinghy we could see the anchor in the clear water apparently set in reverse, the chain leading round an overhanging rock. I decided this was alright - though Sandy wasn't so sure. We dinghied to the beach at the head of the bay to walk the tricky coastal path.

Owl anchored at Stêr Ouen

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In the night it blew up strongly from the north. I got up to look at about 0200 and found us alright but later I was alerted by Sandy that we had dragged back almost onto *Bolero* and the rocks. We fendered *Bolero* just in time and almost avoided the rocks except for a nick on the rudder's lower trailing edge. Using the bow thruster sturdily to counter the stiff wind, we weighed anchor, slipped the stern line and re-anchored nearer the entrance. A kind Frenchman from the nearby yacht brought back our line. Was *Owl* too big for Stêr Ouen we wondered or had we not tensioned the anchor cable sufficiently?

4 Aug, our plan was to visit Piriac which we had liked so much on previous visits but it is sensible to get somewhere quite close to ensure you can arrive at the top of the tide to get over the marina sill. Thus we went to Penerf where we paid to use their pontoon but this was not even connected to the shore so we'd have done better to anchor. We sailed, leaving the shallow patch near the green post on the bend of Penerf river well to port on the way out. *Owl* stayed at Piriac three days. The little town is charming, with a multitude of flowers and a vast and good market. We took the free marina bicycles north nearly to Pointe Touro, having been south to Croisic previously. We witnessed the parade of sail. One vessel was particularly attractive with twin lugsails and a mizzen. She was long, narrow, fast and could be rowed. This 11.6m elegant vessel is called a Bantry Yawl in France and there are quite a few about worldwide. They are copies of the French Admiral's barge which had been captured by my distant ancestor Richard White with his squad called 'Bantry Horse' at the abortive French invasion at Bantry, Cork in December 1796. White got the credit for repelling the invasion and was ennobled

The Bantry Yawl



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but it was the winter weather and lack of French coordination that were rather more significant.

We sailed for the Morbihan arriving an hour before high water that resulted in us being taken at great speed by the tide to our chosen anchorage on the west side of Île aux Moines, sheltered from the fresh north-easterlies. In the event we picked up a buoy marked 8 which we discovered, on ringing the Capitainerie, was private so we anchored between aux-Moines and Île Creizic which may have been a bit rocky but our anchor held. After lunch we went ashore at Gored. The walk up the central road was crowded and blisteringly hot but we enjoyed the 24 standing stones of Cromlech de Kergonan, claimed to be amongst the most impressive in France. We took our dinghy up to the busy Pointe de Toulindag which we found was a bit crowded to use as an anchorage. Next day we set off with the spring tide, passing good anchorages in a northeasterly on the SE and SW end of aux-Moines and also off Îles Brannec and Govihan. However we ended up at our customary anchorage off Île d'Arz and were soon ashore to the Spar *supermarché*. We walked up the east coast and next morning the west coast, to the Bilhervé Peninsula. We headed off back to Larmor-Baden on the spring ebb being overflown twice by two seaplanes, one of which had a loud speaker saying it wanted to land. We and the other vessels got well clear of the landing area but they did not land to our disappointment. We picked up A8 buoy on the west side of Berder Île but, having rung another Capitainerie, the mooring turned out to be private again so we tried to anchor off the NE of Île Gavrinis but the anchor just dragged.

Marc from the Capitainerie, in his RIB, now offered us a buoy for one night which we were glad to accept. We landed to pay and Marc and he suggested a walk around Île Berder. We'd moored off Île Berder on a previous visit and thought it was private but, as for many Morbihan private islands, concessions are often given. We set off at high water to the nearest landing point and walked the coastal path, which we were asked not to leave, to find several interesting sights. There was at that time substantial tidal height difference between the Île Berder to mainland causeway and youths were enjoying shooting the rapids through the gap in the middle. They reached great speed and it looking spectacular if somewhat perilous. On the NE side we found an enormous holm oak, its great branches reaching out imposingly. We looked into our pretty erstwhile bay and had glimpses of the big house in the middle of the island which was open to visitors later in the month. We also had views of yachts in the main channel, gliding in the spring stream as if on skates and found two grand stone seats. In all, the island was a delight made even better by the nice smell of the pine trees.

It was 13 August and we had told people that we would be home by the end of the month so from the Morbihan, having registered 12.8 knots over the ground on our way out, we set course for Île de Groix. We entered Port Tudy but decided to anchor outside after all. Bad decision as it turned out. On the west side of the harbour there was an attractive rocky bay which seemed to serve but we were not

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too confident of the holding ground and moved to the popular location off the lighthouse at the east end of Groix, well sheltered from the forecast light south-westerly. In the early hours a brisk north-easterly got up and we had a most uncomfortable night together with rain. We set off at 0900 only to have the wind, which at least had come from a favourable direction for the passage, die, to be replaced by the forecast SW fitful wind. We passed a foiled racing boat glumly doing about 2kts downwind.

After Sainte-Marine, where we ate with David and Annette Reynolds (RCC), we reached Concarneau and again met up with Ruth and Pascal and were well dined with their family. In the afternoon Pascal and son picked us up and took us to the Aven River where he had spent his early life. He led us to Witch's Rock, a remarkable huge overhanging glacier-polished lump of granite, standing on its own in woodland. We'd gone up the Aven River at high tide in 1964, stopping at a restaurant on the east side, noting a strikingly attractive young girl in the pilot book. "I knew her", said Pascal. We left Concarneau marina to anchor in front of Pascal's house and the whole family came out in Pascal's launch for drinks. We sailed that evening at 2035 and found a buoy in Baie de la Forêt recommended by Pascal. Next morning we had a great sail to Audierne, picking up another buoy there, where the charge includes taking the rubbish.

To catch the tide we left at 0615, pitch dark though it was. Our greatest concern was always the pot floats. Only this year two of our friends had had to hoist their boat out on account of catching a float. Happily we avoided them and had a murky sail to Camaret. There we anchored and had a sleep. We awoke at 1500 by which time the sun was out with a brisk westerly. As we beat up to the Chenal du Four using the electric winches, I got the tail of the sheet caught in the idling hand winch and we had to lead another sheet to the clew. Even then it was a battle to release the tangle. Another senior moment, added to getting the sheet caught round the forward loo hatch earlier. We picked up a buoy in L'Aberwrac'h costing 30 euros – so we would have done better to anchor. Next to Roscoff via the Île de Batz channel, where we found rafts of thongweed en route which we tried to avoid and once felt we had to remove the robust cords from the rudder. Thongweed seems to be on the increase on the French coast. After the checkout at Roscoff we left for St Peter Port where we fuelled and had friends and Sandy's goddaughter to drinks and supper. On to Braye Harbour, where we managed to anchor between the many moorings. Then home to Lymington, arriving at 1745 on 24 August.

It had been a good and happy cruise. The in-mast furling, davits and the lithium batteries were highly appreciated. The weather was generally sunny and we rarely had as much as F5. In addition to our good friends Pascal and Ruth, who are in another league, the French we met were very polite and glad to see us. We had covered 1101 nautical miles on our South Brittany cruise which, combined with the North Brittany cruise, amounted to 1562 miles.