

Cadet Cruise 2023
Quiberon Bay, France
Will Eaton

In this year's eighth iteration of the now-annual Cadet Cruise, 11 Cadets plus one boyfriend found themselves in the temperate waters of the Quiberon Bay, Southern Brittany, where we had three boats. An Ovni 365 was skippered by Mike Skidmore whose crew were Yann Bracegirdle, Jem McPartlin and Ben Chavasse. Emily Chavasse skippered a Dufour 36 and had Matt Irwin, Hugh Wilson and Josh Tricket for crew. Lastly, my crew aboard our RM 11.8 were Ruth Avery, Emily Cantwell-Kelly and Tristan Bracegirdle.

With a moderate heat wave passing over the North-West of Europe, and while temperatures at home were pushing upwards of 30°, we were greeted by a more pleasant forecast of 23-26° and steady 8-15knots looking to be reliably in the North West. Whilst most of the crew decided on the EasyJet's infamous 6am departure from Gatwick, four of our more committed seafarers chose the midnight ferry departure from Newhaven to Dieppe. What they lacked in sleep however, they gained in precious hours in the land of fine wine and charcuterie. By midday on Saturday 10th June, and all but one had arrived ready to begin their cruise of the Quiberon Bay, with Matt Irwin (boyfriend of Emily Chavasse, RCC) due to arrive the following day.

One can never be sure how long a handover from a charter company might take. We had hoped that the language barrier would lead to brief episode of sign language and gesticulation before the keys were handed over. Crews began passage plans to the Morbihan, aiming to be through the narrows before the tide turned and where we could hastily collect Matt the following day. Those hopes were dashed as the one English speaker able to offer handovers, who was passionate and knowledgeable about the boats, ensured every winch and halyard had the full and thorough briefing that they deserved. Eventually, no sooner than 6pm, we set off and shortly before 9pm we had lines secured on three mooring buoys at Locmiquel within the gulf. Navigating the Morbihan's infamous tidal streams was something all the crew wanted to experience. We were treated to a fantastic evening breeze, keeping the wind until (conveniently) we got to some of the narrower channels.



Sailing out of the entrance of the Morbihan

Cadets are always keen to take on challenges in pilotage and navigation. Onboard SY Vitamine we had a fun lesson in ferry gliding on and off mooring buoys followed by Emily Cantwell-Kelly taking the navigator reigns first. Having read the cautionary tales in our Commodore's Atlantic France pilot book, checked and double-checked the tide times, and decided which narrow and shallow channels might be a little too narrow and shallow, we set off. Weaving and winding between the islands and being hurried along by the currents was exciting and made it a bit of a struggle keeping up with the marks we had passed - or missed entirely in some cases! However, we arrived at the southern end of Ile d'Arz. An unmarked, empty

and sandy-bottomed anchorage beckoned and lunch was served. We attempted to sail out of the Morbihan that afternoon, but the wind became very light as we went round some islands with some of the fastest currents, and the genoa halyard had significantly slipped with no apparent way of heaving it up so the motor was turned on until we had a bit more sea room. Thankfully it turned out to be an easy fix – the halyard had wrapped itself around the spar – and short trip aloft in a rather insecure bosun's chair was all that was needed.

The mainland had been lovely, but with just a week to explore such a beautiful coastline we knew we had to get out to see the islands in the gulf. Sights were set for Ile Houat, and that evening Mike and I greeted the arrival of Julian and Jane Trahair (RCC) aboard Palomar who kindly offered an evening tippie – how could two thirsty Cadets say no?!

Having fixed the halyard the previous day, Tristan Bracegirdle and I discovered a leak in our dinghy when we pumped it up for the first time – quite a big gash had been taken out. Tristan had amazingly never had the joy of patching a dinghy so we dug out the repair kit and set to work. In typical charter boat style, though, we definitely didn't have the best tools to work with. There were no sharp knives or scissors to make round edges on the patch, and no sandpaper to make a better contact. Alas, we could only do with what we had, and the patch seemed to last the week if we did some regular top-ups with bellows!



A French gaffer off Ile Houat.

It has become a bit of a theme to have a birthday on the cruise, and this year it was Hugh Wilson's turn. Ruth Avery once again took responsibility for cake baking (it would be cheating to buy one) and that evening Hugh of course enjoyed an evening working through the Song Book as we sat at anchor off the south coast of Belle Ile.



Hugh unwrapping the fisherman's net

In the crisp early morning sun the following day, whilst enjoying freshly brewed coffee and mulling over the previous day's choice of poison, I watched what no one likes to see when at anchor – a fisherman beginning to heave up a line net which seemed to be going straight over Emily Chavasse's chain. Emily hadn't seen him, as he was a little way further upwind, and proceeded to pick up her anchor. "It seems stuck" hails Hugh Wilson from the foredeck! He heroically left into the dinghy (possibly still in pyjamas) when the anchor and net were at the waterline and freed the net. Merrily on their way, they left behind a rather agitated French fisherman. But that wasn't the end of the net! He continued to haul in the remainder, and the angle of attack from his winch led rather alarmingly directly under

our keel. The fisherman, undeterred, manoeuvred his boat and somehow we escaped net-free under sail.

Unusually for charter boats, all three came equipped with asymmetric spinnakers. We all wanted to make sure there was a good passage suitable for a spinnaker run and with a steady 10-12 knots from the WNW we set sights on the river town of Penerf. Whilst Emily and Mike's boats each opted for a more southerly route to pick up a lunch-time spot on the islands, we made use of the wind and continued straight there. The yacht was clearly in its sweet-spot and were regularly making 8-9 knots. We arrived into Penerf as the wind began to ease, and all crew enjoyed a cooling swim in the river on arrival. The day was topped off with a beer and charcuterie ashore, followed by a pontoon dinner party – very hard to beat!



Under spinnaker heading to Penierf



Enjoying a pontoon picnic that evening

We all wanted to make sure we got in one full-crew dinner ashore. Aiming for Le Palais on Belle-Ile, once again we managed to get favourable wind. Although light airs, the upwind sail back across the Quiberon Bay meant we could make 5-6 knots and only need to make one tack. Le Palais's outer harbour is known to have an interesting mooring arrangement. There are two strings of five buoys, and each are designed to hold 2-3 boats each. The first row of boats go bows to the harbour wall, and the next row slot in behind. The harbour masters are like ballet dancers in their launches, and spinning on a sixpence can slot you into almost any gap. I was tasked with reversing our yacht with a four metre-wide stern into a gap that looked about 3 metres wide, whilst there was enough of a gusting crosswind to make the bow slip off at any moment. I shouldn't have doubted the helm of the launch. Just as my stern was about to make contact with a buoy, the launch would yank it a couple of metres out the way, and swiftly head up to my bows to bring the full manoeuvre to a relaxed close. Well-deserved refreshments followed!

With further light winds in the forecast, and return travel beginning to be discussed, we stopped off on Ile Houat for our final night. Exploring the quiet island and its long sandy beaches and enjoying a sing-song to bring the week to a close, everyone was once again very thankful for the support of the Marshall Fund for a great week of cruising!