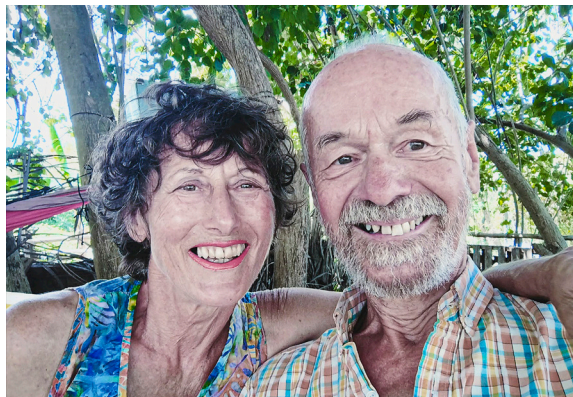


Towards Newfoundland

Isles of Scilly to Newfoundland

Pete Hill



Pete Hill with Linda

To my mind a good cruise should have an objective, a destination, but much of the pleasure is in the journey towards it. My step daughter lives in Newfoundland so that was the good reason to go there. I had first visited in 1997 and knew that it is also an interesting cruising ground.

There is no cruise without a boat and at the end of June 2022, Linda and I finally launched *Kokachin*. She is a French design 'Jonque de Plaisance', a 39 foot wood epoxy centreboard junk. She was lying in a farm yard not far from Paris, basically a hull and deck.

We shipped her back to Cornwall in 2019 and fitted her out. It had taken us three years, working full time, to complete this unfinished project.

The shortest route to Newfoundland is across the North Atlantic but it seemed prudent to have a shakedown cruise before heading out into the ocean. So after visiting the Scilly Isles we crossed the channel to Brittany.

Linda is both a great correspondent and very gregarious. For many years she had been the membership secretary of the Junk Rig Association and had kept up with members far and wide.



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While in Brest we visited Bruno and Elise. They had built *Lacatao*, a sister ship to *Kokachin* and had just returned from an eight year circumnavigation. I had met them in New Zealand and New Caledonia some years ago.

The sail down to Benodet was enlivened by just missing the tide through the Raz de Sein. Linda likened the next couple of hours as 'white water rafting'. By this time we had some experience of sailing our new boat. We were pleasantly surprised to find that despite her 13 ton displacement she was a lively sailor and quite fast. As Pete Pye, (former club commodore and renowned gaff rig sailor,) described his boat, *Moonraker*: "She looks like a box, but sails like a witch". The only downside seemed to be a very heavy helm, despite quite a long tiller. Best looked at as a characteristic rather than a problem, a handy billy helps a lot as soon as the wind picks up.

Crossing Biscay and arriving in Galicia we were now in the 'Orca Attack' zone and avidly following the reported sightings. On wandering around a boatyard in A Coruña we saw three yachts having their rudders rebuilt. Sailing along the coast felt a little like Russian Roulette. All the attacks had been in daylight so we felt that the sail from Baiona to Porto would be best done at night.

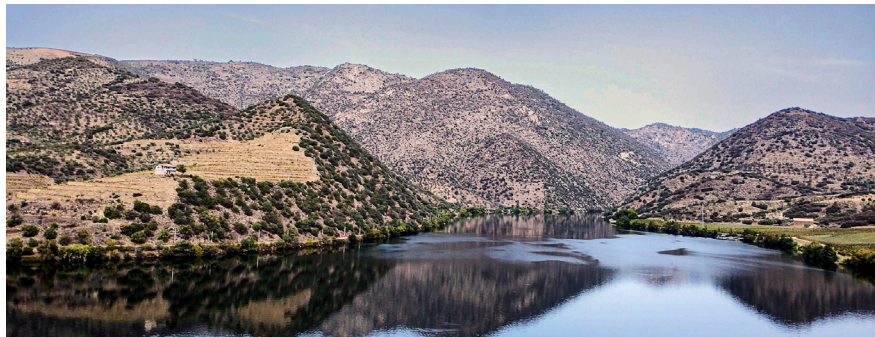
A fast sail down the coast had us anchored in the Douro for breakfast. The anchorage just up

Pete boarding the partly built boat, as we found her, in France

Kokachin also, perhaps, 'looks like a box, but sails like a witch'



Pete Hill



View from the tourist train running along the Douro valley

from the mouth of the river was ideal with a short row to the north shore and there was a bus and tram stop to take us into the city. It was early October but still the city was packed with tourists, despite which it was a very interesting city to wander around. The highlight of the visit was taking the train up the Douro valley to the end of the line and back. The track hugs the side of the river with splendid views of the vineyards.

Worried by the continuing orca problems we gave up on visiting Lisbon and sailed for the Algarve by going well offshore, outside the shipping lanes. A cruise along the coast brought us to Faro to visit a very old friend of mine who lives on her boat there. The proximity of the airport and cheap end of season flights tempted Linda to fly to Croatia to see her family. On her return I went down with Covid followed a few days later by Linda. We spent a few days recovering anchored off Culatra before setting off for Madeira. We never got there, the very light SW winds defeated us and we bore away for the Canary Islands.

First stop was Graciosa. The anchorage at Playa Francesca was very crowded and when it started blowing onshore we escaped to the lee of Lanzarote, a few miles away. Here we met Trevor Robertson (RCC) on *Ironbark III* and Karl and Miki on *Fai Tira*, a Nicholson 32, who we would see much more of in the Caribbean. An official chased us out the next evening and we sailed overnight to Playa Blanca and then on to Las Palmas, arriving just as the ARC mob had left.

My 90 days in Europe were up so we sailed down to Sal in the Cape Verde. The first couple of days gave us good runs but then the wind went light with very relaxed sailing. From Sal on to Brava, anchoring first in Tantun at the south of this small island. The bay is in the wind shadow of the island and a welcome relief from the boisterous trade wind, it is also home to a small community of fishermen who launch their open, outboard powered 20 foot boats from the stony beach each morning. The village was on the top of the cliff up a very steep footpath, poor people with a hard life.

After couple of days of peace and tranquillity we sailed upwind to the port of Fuma. Here you anchor and take lines ashore to the rocky breakwater. Tcha,

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is the local yachtsman's friend who helped us tie up and showed us around. The main town on the island is Nueva Sintra, a six kilometre minibus ride up a steep switchback road. It is a charming town of cobbled street and well-dressed people. Many of them go away to the USA and Europe to work and then bring back their pension to retire, so there is some prosperity.

The crossing to Tobago was windy and quite quick at 15.5 days for the 2160 miles. At times wind was blowing F6 to 7. On one occasion there was an involuntary gybe which severely bent one of the aluminium battens and on another day the mainsheet caught around the wind-vane and broke it off, but it was soon repaired.

We anchored in Charlottesville at the north end of Tobago. The village, surrounded by rainforest, is a tranquil place with minimal tourism. The local outboard powered skiffs go out each morning successfully trolling for fish. The only downside to the place is the roly anchorage. We were pleased when *Fai Tira* arrived from Cape Verde. We shared many walks, sails, dinners and laughs with them before they sailed on to Martinique and we to Prickly Bay, Grenada.

Kokachin has a DIY coppercoat bottom, which worked well in European waters, but couldn't cope with the tropics. Her big bottom was too much for me to scrub regularly, so we sailed up to Tyrell Bay in Carriacou and hauled out to put on some antifouling paint. *Ironbark III* was anchored here and Trevor, who knows the place well, helped us sourced materials before he set off for Panama and the Pacific.

Once relaunched we had a hard sail to Martinique and then again loosely sailed in company with *Fai Tira* up the Islands to St Martin. Our experience of the Caribbean was that there were way too many yachts and Tobago was the best of the islands we visited.

From St Martin it's due north to Canada with Bermuda lying on the route. We left towards the end of April and spent two weeks in Bermuda visiting friends.

Much of the passage north towards Nova Scotia was close hauled crashing into the waves. I noticed that the port forward bulwark had broken away from the deck. It seemed unlikely that wave action had done this, but on arriving in Lunenburg we could see that we had hit something large, a log maybe.

The south coast of Nova Scotia has many anchorages some of which we visited as we day sailed towards Cape Breton. After locking into the Bras d'Or lakes we stopped off at Baddeck. Here one of the locals, Henry Fuller (RCC Hon Foreign Rep, Nova Scotia) made us most welcome and offered us a berth at his Cape Breton



Linda relaxing in Bermuda

Pete Hill



Aboard *Kokachin* with the helpful Henry Fuller, berthed in his yard

Boatyard. The sheltered berth and a few days of warm, dry weather meant we were able to do the repairs to *Kokachin*'s bow.

Our objective was now close. We set off from Ingonish to cross the Cabot Strait to Newfoundland. This has a reputation for fog, strong winds and currents flowing in and

out of the Gulf of St Lawrence. It did not disappoint, the wind was F5 from the east, with a rough sea and mostly thick fog. We were sailing fast at 7 - 8 kts hoping to complete the 90 mile passage in daylight. Having set out at the crack of dawn we took watches to get some rest. Linda had to steel herself to do her watch, tearing along in rough seas, relying on AIS while peering into the impenetrable fog. Once past the Strait the fog cleared and the seas diminished in the lee of the land. We anchored tired but pleased to be in Codroy well before sunset.

My step daughter, Irene and her family live in Corner Brook, in the Bay of Islands, on the west coast. We tied up at the yacht club and spent 10 days ashore with Irene and Neil and little Noah. Usually while cruising there is only the opportunity to see coastal areas, so we were very pleased that the family drove us around to see something of inland Newfoundland. The highlight of which was the spectacular Gros Mourne National Park. .

From Corner Brook we sailed north up the west coast to the Straights of Bell Isle – day sailing wherever possible. Once round the top of the island there is the recreated Viking settlement at L'Anse aux Meadow. This was a popular spot, with two other yachts there, the only time away from a town that we shared an anchorage.

We were visiting Newfoundland at the end of the lobster season



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Here we saw our first iceberg, peaking out of the fog. There was still some thick fog about as we sailed around to St Anthony, but thereafter it was thankfully absent and for the rest of our cruise we had generally glorious weather, with little fog. However, it did mean very light winds with often dawn to dusk sailing between anchorages to progress 20 miles. The anchorages were almost always lovely and each day Linda would declare “This is the best one yet!”

Once around Northern Peninsula, and cruising down the east coast of Newfoundland, the fishing villages became more numerous. Often on anchoring a local would ask if we needed anything and give us a cod. As we approached Fleur de Lys we were surrounded by five whales feeding on capelin, one even surfacing a boat length away.

One of the more memorable stops was La Scie. It was Linda’s birthday and we had hoped to eat ashore. The one cafe was booked up but they suggested the Tea Room at the local museum, every village seemed to have its own museum. The Tea Room closed at 1800, just as we arrived. Nevertheless, they invited us in, made us the most delicious meal and entertained us with local stories and music.



The fishing village of Fogo on the east coast of Newfoundland

And so we proceeded round the island calling at Twillingate, Fogo, Bonavista, Catalina and other anchorages in between. Then came St John’s – the big city. It is a commercial harbour and not set up for yachts so we tied up alongside some huge tires, in the centre of the town. We needed more diesel but most gas stations don’t sell diesel. After fruitlessly walking to a couple in town a local, who stopped to chat, volunteered to drive me to find some. He wasn’t daunted to have to go at least eight kms away, typical of the friendliness and helpfulness of many of the people we met.

We pressed on to Burin where we waited out some rare bad weather, but it did mean we were befriended by another couple, Don and Ethel Peter, who took us into their family. We had intended to call in at the French island of St Pierre, just off the south coast. It was shrouded in thick fog so we gave it a miss and saved ourselves

Pete Hill



Kokachin, comfortable down below, and alongside in the outport of Francois



having to clear back into Canada. The final phase of our circumnavigation was the south west coast, which is considered the most spectacular scenery, with deep fjords and bare rock. We dipped our toes into the edge of the Bay d'Espoir, sailing through Little Passage and anchoring in Middle Goblin Bay. Further West is the outport of Francois,

at the head of the bay surrounded by high cliffs. The houses cling to the rock and a torrent of water runs through the middle of the village. Our Newfoundland cruise ended at the island of Ramea. The weather forecast spoke of high winds for the south coast and as it was late in August it seemed prudent to scuttle back to Nova Scotia while we could.

Our objective had been achieved. The cruise around Newfoundland was wonderful thanks to the unusually good weather, we had actually been able to see the island rather than imagine it in the usual fog. Delightful anchorages and friendly welcoming people. What we found surprising was how few other yachts were there. As to the whole journey, what stands out in our minds is the people we met, old friends revisited and new friends made and some great sailing.