

A 'foreign' cruise

Channel Islands to the Solent

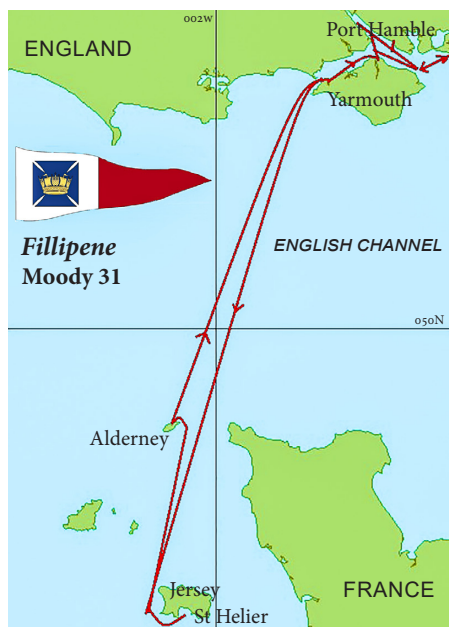
Nick Bailhache

Last year I was unable to cruise in France and so this year I thought I would go 'foreign'. This meant going to the UK. The plan was to leave Jersey on the day of the Round the Island race and arrive in Yarmouth when everyone had gone home. The Solent seemed a reasonable place to visit as many people would be going down to the West Country which I was advised was going to be very busy, thereby increasing the number of available berths in the Solent.

The first challenge was to prepare Covid related forms to visit Alderney, which necessitated completing an online Covid form for Guernsey. On 3 July Mike Backhurst (RCC) and I set off. Within 10 minutes my new chart plotter alarm was sounding. It appeared that the voltage was varying between 0 and 40 volts so I switched the alarm off, problem solved. After a couple of hours motoring, the spinnaker was hoisted and the engine switched off for about an hour before the wind dropped and the engine had to be started again. In Alderney we were directed to an isolation buoy and we asked whether Mike could visit the hospital as he had

hit his head in the foc'sle and, being on blood thinners, was bleeding quite profusely. The harbour authorities very kindly picked us up, took us to the hospital and patched Mike up. We were back aboard by 2200.

The 0525 shipping forecast gave S to SW winds between F4 and F6 with showers. We cast off at 0600 with two slabs and continued motoring. By 0745 we were approaching the shipping lane where a ship altered course to go under our stern. The wind by this time was SSW4 so the genny was set and one slab taken out. With the wind dead aft it was still useful to have the engine running as we were hopeful of carrying the tide up the Needles Channel. Later the wind increased to 22 knots and the



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engine was switched off and the mainsail stowed. When we called Solent Coastguard to inform them of our arrival, we were surprised to be asked whether we were wearing lifejackets (which we were!). The sun was still out but the wind had increased to 24-25 knots. Yarmouth harbour was very accommodating, we were allocated a berth and arrangements were made for Mike to visit the hospital in Newport as his head was still bleeding considerably. He came back properly strapped and very hungry.



Mike well and truly strapped up

The following afternoon we had a very pleasant sail in a SW3 to Port Hamble, a Passeport Escales marina which affords me reciprocal berthing rights. However, having not used the system for two years I had forgotten to say that I had left my home marina, and the computer said “No”! The staff were very helpful and sorted everything out. We were then met by Richard Burnett (RCC) who we invited on board for supper. Richard was a mine of information and said that the mud everywhere was very soft so one had to keep a close eye on the echo sounder.

A day relaxing included a gentle walk down to Hamble Point which I’ve never visited before, a morning coffee with my golfing partner and his wife and an afternoon walk to check out Mercury Yacht Harbour where we had to move the following day. Drinks aboard with friends preceded a good dinner at Ye Old Whyte Harte, but the service seemed very slow which slightly dampened the evening.

Meals punctuated the next day. By 0930 we were breakfasted, watered and fuelled ready for our short trip to Mercury Yacht Harbour, from where Richard drove us to Southampton to pick up my daughter Fiona. Mike was despatched back to Jersey after lunch, a prolonged affair. Supper was at Richard’s where we had to watch England win their semi-final in the Euro 2020.

8 July dawned grey and we proceeded down the Hamble and up to Hythe Marina. After 1 ½ hours we arrived to find that the lock was in free flow and we were advised of our berth. The marina staff were again very helpful and reprogrammed my Passporte Escales card to give me access to the facilities. The bicycles were

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Fiona and the Spice Girls' Bus AirBnB

over 15 knots. As we normally reef at 13 knots and the ebb had just begun, plan B needed executing. A quick call to the Island Harbour on the River Medina secured us a berth. They were quite surprised that we arrived at the time we said we would, unfortunately some people don't even bother to tell them if they are not coming. A walk along the coastal path, often muddy, to the Folly Inn was considered essential to complete our exploration of the area. As masks were required inside, we were lucky enough to obtain an outside table for a drink. On our similarly muddy return, the

Fillipene in Hythe Marina



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Spice Girls bus was investigated and found to be an Airbnb. After dinner a few games of Uno ensued. Needless to say, the younger generation seemed to win most of the time.

We reached Newport on the flood the following day but it was so quiet we turned round and drifted at 2 knots down the river. Once the sails had been hoisted the rain stopped and we had a pleasant potter to Hythe, arriving there at tea time and said our farewells to Briony. Friendship and a gentle breeze took us back to Hamble Point to catch up with a friend I had known since childhood.



Nick and daughter Fiona

An 0800 start on 12 July saw a NNE wind at 10 knots. A course was set for Chichester with a minimum depth of 11 feet expected, a far cry from my normal depth of at least 40 feet. Mid-morning saw us tacking for West Pole at Chichester Harbour entrance where the engine was fired up for the entrance at half tide. When we called Chichester Marina I was surprised to be asked whether we had booked 24 hours earlier. Being a 'foreigner', I normally expect to be able to find a berth particularly when there only seemed to be about 95% occupancy. Despite which, they couldn't offer us a berth. This was a bit of a blow, but fortunately Birdham Pool Marina said they would find us a space.

My reasoning for trying for Chichester Marina was that access is about five hours either side of high water whereas Birdham Pool is only three hours. It being one hour before high water Fiona turned to starboard when she saw the green piles leading to the lock. Motoring at around four knots there was a sudden lurch and we stopped roughly 40 feet from the piles. I knew that we should have been 10 feet from the piles to be in the channel leading to the lock. I remembered Richard's words about the mud being soft so I engaged full ahead with the tiller hard over to head for the channel. Having been stuck on mud in the Rance canal 35 years ago I was not going to engage astern like one might on hitting a rock or hard sand. There would be no guarantee where the stern would go. The other advantage of going ahead is that there is generally more power available than going astern. *Fillipene* was coaxed to 90° to the channel. Another yacht then approached the lock, Fiona observed the bow wave and egged them on. A sudden burst ahead when the four inch bow wave hit us and we started moving. The lock keeper was very helpful and gave us a berth which was probably the only space available that night.

Bikes were unloaded for an anticipated ride to Chichester. Not wanting to cycle along the main road we decided to take a footpath parallel to the canal.

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After about 400 yards and a lot of weaving round stinging nettles and potholes full of water, an about turn was required. We found Chichester Marina (seemingly with more than enough room for us) but the bike ride to Chichester was abandoned due to a looming black cloud. The return to *Fillipene* was made during a torrential downpour – with little wind there was no hope of the rain finishing early. The consolation prize was that we had bought strawberries for supper.

After a bike ride to Itchenor for coffee, we locked out at lunchtime, and sailed on the jenny all the way to Sparkes Marina, a 24 hour access marina nearer the entrance of Chichester Harbour so that we could get away at a reasonable hour and not be troubled by the tide. We cycled and inspected the channel at low tide in anticipation for our departure, and watched a small boat, with a draft of less than one metre, scrape in.

The next day we cast off one hour after low water and found we had a minimum depth of 9.6 feet. Apparently the shallowest part is just off the beach from which the dinghies are launched. With an 8 - 9 knot NW wind we were hard on and had a foul tide. We were lucky to get a berth at Shepards Marina at Cowes but, after a saunter along the sea front for an ice cream, we were surprised to find that we were completely hemmed in by a charter boat. I asked what time he was leaving (0900); I said I wished to go at 0800 for Fiona to catch her train from Hamble to Gatwick. Whereupon the skipper kindly told his crew that they would be leaving at 0800.

After Fiona had left, I had a few days on my own, broken by a weekend showing my childhood friend, Jacky, some of the Solent's sights from the water. Soon it was time to prepare for the return journey to Jersey with Bill Harris. The July heatwave was in full swing so there was little wind for the morning trip to Yarmouth. As there was time we nipped into Newtown for lunch, picking up a visitor's buoy. The trip to Yarmouth was a motor job again before battles ensued completing Covid forms. Stopping in Alderney appeared to be a problem, so we headed direct to Jersey. We cast off at 0903 to catch the tide through the Needles. The jib was unfurled and furlled a few times but there was never enough wind to sail properly. The tide was right for the Alderney Race and then all the way to Jersey, arriving at 0300. My 'foreign' cruise over, I hope to be back in France next year, Covid permitting.



Hayling Island promenade