

Royal Cruising Club Cadet Cruise

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After the enormous success of the Cadet Cruise to Ireland in 2018, and with the reigns for Cadet Captainship dutifully passed on to Katie Schuster, the cruise to Galicia had high expectations. The prospects of not wearing oilskins for a week certainly got a few of the Cadets excited, and so three boats were chartered for this year's Cadet Cruise. On board Bbcap (Jeanneau 39), skipper Will Eaton was accompanied by Katie Schuster, Hugh Wilson, Jasper Ross, Alex Bridger and Mike Whitcutt (friend of Hugh's). Sailway Uno (Elan 37), skippered by Mike Skidmore, was crewed by Ben Warnick, Glen Gowers, Rosie Bridger, Tristan Bracegirdle and Evanna McGuinness. Finally, Pillabens (Bavaria 38, although later in the week became an Elan 45, more on that later!) was skippered by Charlotte Petter, and crewed by Emily Chavasse, Tom Bott, Tom Chivers, Callum McLaren-Stewart, and Yann Bracegirdle.

No European holiday is complete without the early morning flight out there, so the Cadets gathered together at Gatwick and Stansted in eager anticipation of the week to come. Forecasts were trawled through, and the newly released RCCPF guide to Atlantic Spain and Portugal was scoured over. With the taxi drivers in Spain slightly confused at how to get 12 people into 11 seats, we were on our way to the coastal city of Vigo.

We were met by one of the charter company's representatives at the marina, and after a bit of gesticulation to get over the language barrier, the handovers were completed and the boats were ready to go. We set off across the Ria to Praia de Limens for our first night. No sooner had we left the marina had smoke appeared from Charlotte's engine bay. With the crew sure there was no fire, the hatch was opened and no simple diagnosis could be made. Bbcap stayed close by, and the safest harbour appeared still to be Limens, so we all continued under sail to the anchorage. After weaving through the mussel beds we had arrived, and an engineer was booked in for the morning.



With the engine appearing ready to go (after first being described as 'incredible' by the engineer), and needing to be within reach of Islas Cies for the Club meet on Monday, the anchorage for Sunday night was decided as the next door bay, Praia de Negra. The three boats all chose slightly different routes; Mike Skidmore headed to Baiona for a lunch stop, Will Eaton headed north around Islas Cies to scope out the Island, and Charlotte, with her engine having more difficulties, followed a similar but abridged route.

Monday morning was an earlier rise for the Cadets as, together with Nick Chavasse and the Lagos family, Katie had planned the lunchtime meet. After initially deliberating on the best anchorage for the forecast increase in winds overnight and wanting to reduce the distance to carry the refreshments for the picnic, the Cadets settled on Nosa Señora. The gin was laid out, and the Lagos' delicious sangria put under ice, the Cadets gathered at the shores of Praia de Rodas to collect their assigned members.

The picnic was a great success, with the Cadets getting to know many of the other members and recanting the tales of their week so far. However, with the sight of a burgee drifting through the anchorage, the picnic was brought to a close and the Cadets retreated to the safety of their sheltered anchorage. Later to be joined by Wild Bird (Nick and Margie Chavasse), Quicksilver (Mike and Hilde Gill) and Sea Rover (Hugh and Alexandra Tidbury), the Cadets felt reaffirmed in their initial decision to relocate that morning!



After Will had departed, keen to attract the other two cadet boats out of the anchorage, it became clear that Charlotte's engine problems were not as 'incredible' as the engineer had first thought. The initial plan to visit Ria de Aldán was achieved only by Will, as this time Mike Skidmore lent his support to Charlotte. As the wind began to ease, Mike pressed on to Combarro with Will, where the marina were advised of the hopeful arrival of an ailing yacht. In the northern reaches of Ria de Pontevedra, the wind fell to little more than a puff, and so the helpful marina staff very kindly offered their assistance in a RIB and a tow if necessary.

With a visit from the engineer at no later than 2330 to check on two of the boats, it was agreed that Pillabens was not fit to see us through the end of the week, and a two month-old Elan 45 was delivered to a smiling Charlotte the following morning. With some re-provisioning and a walk around the historic town on the order of play, another visit to Ria de Adlán was decided on. The anchorage, Praia de Areabrava appeared good holding on the charts and by the pilot guide, so Will led in Mike (whose tablet chart plotter had had enough of the sun) between the mussel beds and narrow area of deeper water. It turned out that the chart plotter was perhaps a little out of date. As the cadets headed to the beach to see off the sunset, Hugh Wilson spotted an ominous looking collection of concrete blocks close below the surface and straight under the bow.



With the charter company keen to make amends for Charlotte's boat, they offered to get us additional permits to spend our last night before returning to Vigo back in Islas Cies. This time we opted for the southern island. However, last year's Fastnet race left some Cadets feeling they had unfinished business and so the Sydney-Hobart style Aldán-Cies race was officially announced. With the three boats hustling their way along the start line between mussel beds at the entrance to the Ria, the race was begun. With a freshening NW breeze, a beat out of the Ria turned into a game of tactics, deciding whether the coastal or offshore route might be more favourable. Despite Bbcap's initial lead, the racier rig of the Elan 37 and the waterline length of the Elan 45 left the Jeanneau struggling to keep up. A visit by the Vice Commodore to check the Cadets were doing some sailing clearly distracted the two Elans as Bbcap made some gains. As the boats drew close to the agreed finish line, the new Elan was spotted by both other boats to have clearly missed the entire finish and was duly disqualified. The winner, therefore, was Mike Skidmore's Sailway Uno.

Joined by Henry (Peter and Wendy Whatley) and Calypso (Tim and Sophie Trafford) in the anchorage, the three cadets rafted up for the evening before separating when swell from the regular inter-island ferries left the raft untenable. With the Song Book only gathering salt, the Cadets with more knowledge of the songs, enthusiastically led by Ben Warnick, taught the newer members the delight of the book. As a call came from across the anchorage for a rendition of Sir Jasper, the Cadets could all but comply, and the 'singing' continued long into the night.



The boats were returned to Vigo in the afternoon after a beautiful final sail down the Ria and were handed back to the charter company for them to complete their checks. Impressed with the mileage (which in our opinion was rather low!) and the lack of diesel used, we handed back the keys to boats which had tested all three skippers in their knowledge of diesel engines. All that was left was to send each other on their way with some celebratory tapas, and to thank Katie Schuster as Cadet Captain for all the work she put in to organise such a great week for 18 Cadets and potential Cadets.

Thanks must also go to Miles Woodhouse for all his work in organising the charter and liaising with them afterwards. Finally, each year the Cadets are evermore grateful to the late Noel Marshall for providing funding for the trip. It truly does bring all the Cadets together and gives them opportunities to explore new cruising grounds without the assistance of their usual skippers!