

# Brittany Cruise 2017

Jervis Devonshire

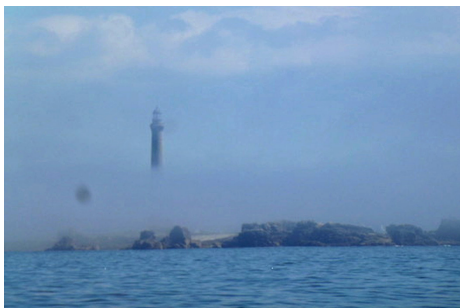
*Stardust*, our Malo 36, acquired spring 2016 in Belfast, had performed well on our Highland cruise during that summer, but required a serious rudder tube rebuild; this was impeccably executed by Jeremy Rogers in our



home port of Lymington last winter. Our choice of cruising ground this summer was Brittany, to join the RCC rally at La Roche Bernard. Some slack in the programme was also essential to complete unfinished business from our cruise of Biscay islands in 2013, in particular, the Ile de

Sein, which is best visited in clement weather and neap tides.

We departed Lymington at 0330 on the 26 May with Martin Stanley aboard. As we cleared The Needles, the promised south-east breeze filled in soon after dawn at 12-15 knots for perfect sailing conditions, a 'soldiers' breeze' on the beam. Hurling through The Swinge at 1400, the breeze now gusting over twenty knots, we were feeling very pleased with our passage, until we slightly misjudged the rapid switch to an east-going tide off the north tip of Guernsey, and adjusted our course to the west. Nevertheless, we were all fast in St Peter Port in good time for a fine dinner ashore, bidding farewell to Martin, and his



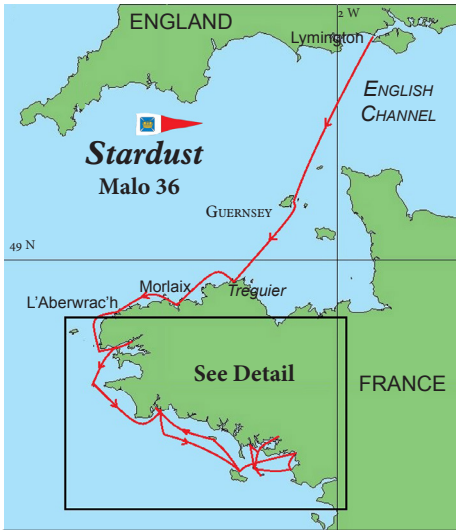
Ile Vierge emerges from the fog

soldiers' breeze, the next morning. We welcomed to the adjoining berth William and Susanna Garnett (RCC) on their beautifully restored *Hero*, a Frers Hylas, topsides resplendent in dark blue paint.

After evading an encircling powerboat race off St Peter Port, our passage continued in light winds and poor visibility, reaching sanctuary at anchor under the Chateau in the Treguier River with owls hooting on the wooded banks above us. Moving on to Morlaix, friendly and charming as ever, with dangerous patisseries, we proudly conquered the local bus system to shop at the *supermarché*, and admired a posse of touring TR sports cars.

On 1 June in the Ile de Batz inshore passage we finally met a sailing breeze, later to fade into fog; this fortunately cleared as we found the Lizen Ven Ouest buoy, and shaped course for L'Aberwrac'h via the short cut through the narrow Chenal de la Malouine, taking care to avoid the shallows. On the next mooring we met *Nana*, Colin and Marilyn Ford (RCC), also on route for the Rally.

Our passage through the Chenal du Four was uneventful, and we anchored under the Anse de Bertholme to await a favourable tide into Brest.



Mooring buoys, fishing floats and swell discouraged staying overnight. A NW F5 filled in and we sailed past the Elorn bridge under genoa, anchoring on the east bank just clear of the moorings.

## Jervis Devonshire

We shifted on Sunday morning to the marina at Port Moulin Blanc, taking fuel and meeting our regular sailing companions, Tony and Joan Fabian. The forecast gales made us revise our plan to sail on round to Benodet. In these conditions the visit to the Ile de Sein could not happen, so we revisited old favourites in the Brest area, sailing up the Aulne to Chateaulin, anchoring just before the Pont de Terenez (in the second little bay south of the bridge where the holding is good), to await the next morning tide. Little visited, this river is quiet and peaceful, and enjoyable despite the wind and rain. Locking in at Guily-Glaz, with the friendly keepers, we thought of the many held at Camaret in less comfort as the north-westerly gale blew. A wet and windy overnight stay on the quay at Chateaulin saw the gale out, and anchoring in the same spot on our return downstream, the weather improved to a fine evening. On Wednesday 7 June we shifted to anchor off the pretty Port Maria and dinghy ashore to visit the ancient



Dressed for gales at Chateaulin

abbey of Landevennec, founded in the late 5th century, with a well organised museum and tour. There is also an very popular restaurant in the village, but even in June booking was necessary. Unusually for France there are no charges for the lock or berthing overnight in the Aulne river.

Back at Moulin Blanc on 8 June, we never cease to be impressed by the continual use of the youth sailing facility there, a vast hive of training from Optimists to cats, canoes and windsurfing; sailing must be on the school curriculum. No wonder it is a more popular sport than in the UK.

We visit the Oceanarium, much revised since 2013, with a great penguin pool and some giant sea otters from Alaska topping the bill. Visiting Brest city, we surveyed the Marina, named after the nearby Chateau, with good shelter from a double sea-wall. The Chateau houses a fine maritime museum; with its emphasis on Brest, which has been a fortified harbour since Roman times, it is well worth visiting.

We pressed on to the south, staying overnight alongside in Camaret as it was still too swelly in the anchorage, and had a brisk walk to view the ancient Menhirs. We anchored in the Bay of Douarnenez, first at the Anse de Norgard, as written up in *Secret Anchorages*, then shifted for the night to anchor a mile north in the pretty and more sheltered bay, Anse de Saint Hernot, where we passed a peaceful night.

Rising at 0500 to meet the tide for the Ile de Sein, we motored in a light NE wind toward Tevennec, leaving the light to port instead of the usual route for the Raz passage, timing the slack tide to cross to Cornoc-an-Braden, and following the clear leading marks for the tiny harbour, then anchoring in the small pool south of the Guernic rock. The breeze remained light and shifted to a more favourable SE. We felt comfortable to go ashore once the anchor bit. There is only space for three or four yachts; one Frenchman had multiple tries to anchor with a Danforth, while our



Approaching Ile de Sein from the Raz de Sein

trusty Spade bit first time. On half springs, it would be hard to remain through a low tide in this shallow, inner anchorage, although very settled conditions would allow anchoring further north in deeper water.

Ashore, the island is flat and windswept, the close packed town has many seemingly empty houses and a shrinking population. Plants only grow below the low garden walls. A few cafes await the arrival of the tripper boat from Audienne. We had the island to ourselves.

Visiting the museum before the tourists, we saw the traditional costumes with pointed hats, worn by the island women well into the 20th century, and we met the aged guardian. In our basic French we established that she was 82 and was 5 in 1940 at the fall of France. That was an historic moment for the tiny island; General de Gaulle issued from London his appeal to all patriotic Frenchman to join him and continue the fight, abandoned by the capitulating French Government. The islanders met outside the mayor's house and voted to a man to fight, supported by the womenfolk, who said that they could run the island. The men, numbering around 120 from the age of sixteen, set sail for Cornwall in their fishing boats, including our museum keeper's *père*; she recounted that he departed, and he returned. On reviewing his recruits in London a few days later, de Gaulle famously remarked that the men of Sein were a 'quarter of France' and later honoured the Island with the Order of the Liberation, and of practical benefit, exemption from income tax! Many other Bretons joined

## Jervis Devonshire

the fight, it was the concentration that made Sein unique.

From the museum we learned that the men mainly served in the free French navy, and mercifully losses were not too high. The story is well told in the museum and highly recommended. Also featured are the many accounts of the wrecks and lighthouses on the wicked reefs of the Chaussée, stretching west from the island into Biscay for miles, and the heroic deeds of the lifeboat men, a reversal of druidic times when virgin priestesses were said to lure travellers onto the rocks.

The magic aura of the island was shattered by the arrival of the ferry from Audienne, and after a coffee and croissant we took the remainder of the tide south. We rounded the Pointe de Penmarche at 1600 entering South Brittany waters and anchoring at 2015 off chic Beg Meil in the Baie de la Foret.

Moving on to the always crowded marina in Concarneau, we met our friends Pauline and Jerry Rook, whose daughter Mary was the only female competitor in the rugged Figaro single-handed series. They were supporting from ashore, and we acted as spectator boat to watch the start. Continuing on to the Iles de Glénan, we took a buoy for the night in the crowded Le Chambre anchorage; despite a stiff breeze, we were visited by Doug Byatt (RCC) rowing his tiny Avon, sadly he had run out of time to make the Vilaine rally with *Blue Fox*.

Returning to Concarneau, we were in time to see the finishers of the Figaro 24 hour race around Ile de Groix, one of the shortest in the series. Mary was in



The lock at Arzal, Vilaine River

the second half of the fleet, with another of her Brit teammates. The French are masters of sleep deprivation, sailing sharply as if on an afternoon race. An earlier race in this series crossed Biscay to north Spain in a gale gusting over 50 knots. Their final race will be through the

Chenal du Four via the Bishop and Royal Sovereign to Dieppe. Hats off! Attending the reception after the race, one appreciates that the Figaro is a major event in the French sailing calendar, and the quality of the participants is world class.

Saturday 17 June brought a mainly motor passage to Belle Ile, a short stay as we needed to press on. The wind again failed on Sunday, and after another motor, we anchored off the Anse de Succino awaiting the tide into



the Vilaine. We moored overnight on the visitors' buoys off Trehiguier, ready for a run up to Arzal with the morning tide. Locking in at Arzal always seems hectic, the drama conducted by the lock-master. With fuel topped up, we motored up this scenic river to berth at La Roche Bernard, ready for the RCC Rally.

A late change in the Vilaine river management had resulted in lock closures which necessitated arriving earlier than the commencement of the Rally. We made a 5 mile dinghy trip to visit Erik and Franny Salomonsen (RCC) on *Sirius* anchored upriver at Foleux, and after a fine dinner we had an exciting return in the dark. Three days of serious socialising followed, culminating in a splendid dinner for more than sixty at L'Auberge Bretonne, a family-run hotel which coped well with our numbers. After a very enjoyable gathering, we left on the Friday to catch the early lock to spend a few days cruising in company with *Sirius*.

A fresh onshore wind greeted us outside the bar at Trehiguier, kicking up a short sea in the shallow bay. We abandoned plans to visit Penerf in the onshore conditions; Erik who had been there before, wisely advised against and we switched to Piriac as there was sufficient water to clear the sill. The entry is tight, with near breaking waves close in, not the place to dawdle, as did the silently-cursed, small French yacht ahead of us. Once inside there is little space to manoeuvre, definitely a 'drop-sail-outside' place. Safely berthed, we explored the attractive small town, but dined aboard.

We departed Piriac at 0715 23 June, noting 2.9 m on the sill 3 hours after HW Brest, and 3m over the shallows which have to be crossed. In light headwinds and we both motored towards Houat, dropping anchor at 1040 off the splendid beach of Treac'h er Goured. We preferred the north end of the bay, taking a little shelter under the island. We decided that whilst *Sirius*, a Starlight 35, has the legs on us under sail, our 48hp iron topsail is a winner in the light stuff. In the next two days we walked around the island, enjoying the odd coffee/snack stop rather like a skiing day. John Macnamara (RCC), cruising solo in *The Otter*, dropped anchor nearby and joined us for dinner. Cruising in company, we alternate dinner venues. We had a date in Vannes and so were sad to leave our friends on Sunday afternoon, as well as sad to leave this area, but pleased to be escaping the ever present, if usually slight swell.

Swirling into the Morbihan at 9.5 knots is always a thrill. After only a three hour passage we anchored at 1630 off the Pointe de Belure on the north tip of the Ile d'Arz, conveniently placed for the final leg to Vannes which required the rising tide next morning. Departing and nearly missing the tight turn to port at the pink house, we locked in over the sill, and berthed conveniently opposite the *Capitainerie* by the friendly Harbour Master.

## Jervis Devonshire

Our purpose in Vannes was to collect my Canadian cousin, Jonty Parker-Jervis and his delightful partner Chantal, adventurous souls who camp and canoe the great outdoors of Vancouver Sound, but have never sailed. They had just arrived and adjusted their jet lag for a day, whilst we stored up, and pursued the mission to find a stylish dress for Gillian's role as the mother of the bride at Charlotte's wedding in August, some degree of panic setting in, as most of the likely shops were closed on Monday. Ah well, it would have to await a trip to London.

The evening was enhanced by spotting *Flycatcher* berthed nearby; our Commodore was leaving her there for a break in their cruising programme. Henry and Louise joined us for a sundowner before resuming packing.

Jonty and Chantal joined us on Tuesday morning. We were just about to depart when Gillian checked dietary requirements; no to meat, so a rush to the fish market saved the day. We started gently, anchoring back at our same spot off the Ile d'Arz, hiring bikes and circumnavigating the island, checking out the ancient *menhirs* on the south point, finding them amongst fallen pines.

Returning aboard, there was a rare problem, our fridge had packed up. Delayed by attempting unsuccessfully to discover the problem, we missed our tide, and had to motor against the current from Port Blanc, around the Ile Border and Ile Long, sometimes hardly making against the 6 knot current. We eventually rounded the point into the river Auray and took a mooring buoy off the Mouillage de Blor.

Heading upriver the next morning we moored just south of the turn to Bono in a very pretty section of the river, convenient for our dinghy exploration of the upper reaches to view the ancient bridge between Auray and the well preserved medieval quay of St Goustain. The castle above Auray was dismantled and much of the stone shipped to build the citadel at Le Palais on Belle Ile.

Our cousin's brief cruise culminated in a proper sail, leaving our mooring under sail only, we had perfect conditions of 14-22 knots in Quiberon Bay, turning back for La Trinité ahead of an approaching heavy rain squall. Honour satisfied, we had captured a few elements of cruising to add to their memories of visiting Europe. Chantal, a French Canadian from Quebec, had reason to visit Brittany, her family originated there, but left in the 1600s. We dined that night at the splendid L'Azimut in La Trinité, before their departure by train to visit more cousins in Spain, or Catalonia to be exact.

La Trinité seems to be our major repair port; four years ago it was the windlass motor, now the fridge. The electrical firm recommended was unable to help for several days, but a call to our contact from the windlass job brought instant response. Pierre le Courtois, of Skysat confirmed the problem as a faulty control box, we had tried to order one from the UK

agent, but the courier service failed us; it was more expensive from the French agent, but we had the security of Pierre fitting it in a few days time. We took a bus to a nearby *supermarché* to buy a 12v coolbox as a stop gap. There was no return bus or taxi for an hour, but kind locals gave us a lift back in the pouring rain.

We made a rushed one-day turn around in La Trinité, as our regular cruise companions, David and Penny Brough joined the same evening. Laundry, shopping, it was market day which helped, were all accomplished in time for their arrival. The new coolbox had been filled!

Our week with the Broughs took in a bike ride around the Quiberon peninsula, Le Palais in Belle Ile, and a return to our usual anchorage off Treac'h on Houat. After a bumpy night we shifted to Hoedic, followed by a new anchorage up the St Philibert river, just to the east of La Trinité, very quiet and unspoilt, but only usable in neap tides. Returning the next morning to La Trinité, Pierre fitted the new control box and we had a fridge again; he is highly efficient with a 'can do' attitude and well recommended.

Leaving La Trinité, we called at Penerf, a tricky estuary entry, and not much room to anchor. We found space between Penerf and Cadenic and enjoyed a very scenic evening walk. The next morning we found ourselves back at the entrance to the Vilaine, ready to enjoy the lock pantomime once more. We dined again at L'Auberge Bretonne, enjoying an outside table and a nightcap inside the atmospheric and friendly hotel. The Broughs departed, and we tidied *Stardust* for her six week stay on the reasonably priced river mooring. An anti-bird cover was rigged, the owl was hoisted, and we hoped the solar panel would keep the batteries in shape. Home for the Wedding!

## Postscript

We returned on 31 August to find *Stardust* in good shape, bird strikes deterred by the owl, and the battery charged up by solar. We had a week before the lay-up date in Port-la-Forêt, so we headed for the 0800 'out' lock at Arzal; it was still loading the inbound craft and such was the chaos that we finally cleared the lock at 0930. We had arranged to cruise in company again with *Sirius*, and met a few hours later at Hoedic. Finding the few buoys in Port Argol booked out to a rally, we headed round the island and anchored off the drying harbour of Port de la Croix, well sheltered in the forecast northerly wind. We walked round the island next day, cooled off with a swim on a deserted beach and lay on the hot rocks.

At Le Palais long lines were all fast to the breakwater at 1800. A table was negotiated at a lively restaurant, but we regretted being outside until blankets were issued; summer was fading. We walked on Belle Ile in the



## Jervis Devonshire

rain, and took leave of *Sirius* on Monday. We motor-sailed to Ile de Groix in time for an evening stroll and departed early next morning for Benodet to arrive before the wind swung north-west; the shift arrived just before we did and we had gusts of 30kts; reefs went in and we had some of the lumpiest seas of the cruise. We are impressed by the fleet of 5.5 Metres, enjoying an international regatta, a graceful class not seen in the UK; one boat came in minus the mast that day. We moored off Sainte Marine, a favourite spot, and went ashore on the Benodet side to join the long queue for the day's catch at the *poissonnerie*. We moved later the next day to anchor again off Beg Meil, our final stop before the marina at Port-la-Forêt where we hauled out for over-wintering in a cradle in the sheltered yard of Extrado under the watchful care of Pierre Garoche.

Brittany was as enjoyable as ever for the food, lively markets and historic towns, though the waters have become more crowded and areas written of as anchorages are fully occupied with moorings. Next season we will head north for the uncrowded shores of Ireland and Scotland, hoping the weather is better than this year.

## Navigation Note

This year we added a new system from N V Charts to our usual armoury of charts, Imray paper and Navionics vector charts, on the Raymarine plotter and iPad. The new charts are of excellent clarity, with large scale sections of the tricky parts. They come in A3 size booklets, and the bonus is the App version. Once you have downloaded the app onto your devices, each chart booklet purchased entitles you to open those charts on multiple devices. The electronic charts are Rasta format, and have the easiest and swiftest transition from one scale to another, as well as a clarity to rival Admiralty charts and superior to Navionics. We used them on a Microsoft surface tablet, the screen is larger than most plotters, and also on the iPad. At present their coverage in Europe extends from Norway and the Baltic to The Scillies and Biscay, but not yet to Ireland and Scotland. The charts are not the cheapest, but highly recommended.