

In Search of More Sunshine

Or . . . Escaping the Liquid Sunshine of Scotland

Helmut Heine with Anette Nabholz

After a wonderful skiing season at home in Switzerland, we made our way back up to Ardfern on 18 April where *TAO 4* was waiting for us. We spent a lovely two weeks preparing and provisioning the boat, enjoying great times with friends, going for long walks and waiting for the right weather window.

On 3 May Bill and Rosemary McKean (RCC), John MacInnes (RCC), and some other friends waved us good-bye and we motored and sailed in light easterly winds towards Gigha. Sunshine, fairly warm weather and finally a beautiful, peaceful anchorage on the west side of Gigha, in Craro Bay, was just the perfect prelude to our journey. Holding was very good in sand. We were lucky to have the unofficial, very large-scale Antares Charts on our iPad which showed the newest soundings done in 2014. This gave us the confidence to anchor carefully in Poll Mor Bay in 3m. We could not have wished for a nicer anchorage in these NE winds: what a perfect start of our 2017 sailing journey.

Next morning we raised the anchor and started our 60nm trip to Bangor Marina. The NE wind increased steadily and by noon it



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was gusting up to 20kts. With the fair tide our speed over the ground was sometimes going up to 12kts and until we reached the Mull of Kintyre we



With a lovely NE wind we start our sail to Bangor

had very calm seas. Splendid! Only after we got further south of Kintyre did we get a bumpy sea and shortly before Bangor the wind got light and the current turned against us.

We arrived in Bangor Marina

shortly after 1700 and were impressed by the spacious finger docks and friendly service. For dinner we walked 15 minutes to The Jamaica Inn, a traditional pub with good atmosphere, tasty food and a very friendly staff. We enjoyed the evening very much.

The following three days our friends George and Lynn, members of the Royal Ulster Yacht Club (RUYC), who we had met in the Adriatic quite a few years ago, took us in their car all around Strangford Loch, invited us to their gorgeous home and also to Balloo House in Killinchy where we celebrated another lovely, sightseeing day in the old country pub and afterwards a very nice meal. We also had dinner at the RUYC, founded in 1866 and five times challenger for the America's Cup between 1899 and 1930, thanks to Sir Thomas Lipton. We found it really breathtaking to be at this historic location where so much sailing history has been written. The inside of the RUYC building took us back into the early 19th century beautifully. We loved this.



Clubhouse Royal Ulster Yacht Club

We took the train from Bangor to the Harland and Wolff shipyard, where from 1909 to 1912 the *Titanic* was built. She was one of three Olympic Class liners and state of the art vessels, the biggest, fastest and the most luxurious. Overall, the visit to the Museum was very interesting and also a very touching emotional experience for us. 1,500 people lost their lives when she sank.

8 May, shortly after 0600 we left Bangor in a E3-4 to sail towards Dun Laoghaire, 93nm away. At 8°C it was quite chilly. The wind increased to

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F5 and after 11 hours of downwind sailing we arrived in Dun Laoghaire Marina. Right across from the marina is the railway station and it is an easy ride to Tara Street Station. From there we walked along the river Liffey and up O'Connell Street to the Needle (Spire), an impressive, free standing needle-shaped stainless steel landmark built in 2003. We walked around the old city with all the pubs and restaurants, went to the Queen Of Tarts in Cows Lane, in the Temple Bar area, had a delicious meal there and another later at the Pichet restaurant.



Looking back to our visits in Ireland we were thrilled by the friendliness, courtesy and helpfulness of the Irish we met. No matter where we were, whether in a restaurant or on the street, they were all, without exception, friendly and very helpful. A good example was a young lady who had already left the train she had arrived in and saw that we were late and running to catch the train and she quickly turned around, went back and pressed the button on the train door so that it would open again and we could get in. Lovely!

The forecast on 9 May predicted deteriorating weather and many days of increasing southerly winds. Our plan was originally to sail from Dun Laoghaire to the Scillies. However, with strong southerlies, rain and only



Sailing towards the moon on a silver road

the two us on board, we felt it would not be nice to be in the Scilly Isles and sit on the boat keeping anchor watch to make sure that *TAO 4* with her 32 tons displacement would not start dragging unnoticed. So we changed plans and on 10 May set off to sail 242nm to Falmouth. The plan was to use the predicted E and SE winds before the bad weather system with the

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southerly winds would catch us. At noon we started with a fair tide and very light winds. When night came we had a wonderful sail on a glittering



The Longships Lighthouse, Lands End

road towards the moon. Unfortunately the wind dropped and we often had to use the engine. Next day the sky started to get overcast, drizzle came, but the wind was E3 and steadied the boat's movement. As planned we reached Land's End at noon 11 May, passing the Longships. The old lighthouse used to be 24m, however the light was often covered by high seas and was replaced by the current taller one. This gives an idea how ferocious it can be out there.

We continued motor-sailing, close-reaching with a ESE4 to Falmouth. We got a convenient spot on the outside dock of Pendennis Marina. After a good night's sleep and a maintenance day for *TAO*, we walked to downtown Falmouth, had a delicious lunch at the Harbour View restaurant, discovered a tiny but very good Bio-bakery called Stones Bakery where one also can sit down and have little things to eat. At the National Maritime Museum we learned interesting things about Captain Bligh, the Mutiny and his remarkable survival.

Next day we took the passenger ferry from Prince of Wales dock to St. Mawes, had a long walk and then a very good lunch at the tastefully furnished Trensanton hotel with a lovely view across Falmouth



Two ferries connect both sides of the river Dart

Harbour. The following two days it was pouring rain and stormy but on the second, we walked in our oilskins to Oliver's restaurant for excellent food and atmosphere. Falmouth is a favourite place for large cruise ships and from time to time the main road and the stores get completely jammed with people. When they are gone again, peace and quiet return.

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17 May, we had a great sail in a NNW3-4 to Plymouth, 40nm away. Our friend Geoff wanted to meet us there and sail with us to Dartmouth and Guernsey. We checked into Queen Anne's Battery Marina because it is close to the Barbican, the old city centre. Unfortunately, the pedestrian bridge connecting the Marina with the old City couldn't be used because of maintenance work and the walk to the city was quite long. On the first day we went up to The Hoe. Plymouth Hoe is a large south-facing park area above the limestone cliffs and the views across Plymouth Sound, Drake's Island, and the hills of Cornwall are spectacular. The following day we went again on a one-hour sightseeing trip on a passenger ferry around



The antique steam train back to Dartmouth

Plymouth Bay which showed the importance to the city of repair and maintenance work on warships. More peacefully, the world-renowned Princess motor yachts are built in Plymouth as well.

Geoff arrived in the afternoon and when he moved onto *TAO 4* we also talked with a few participants in the OSTAR/TWOSTAR race. Only a few weeks later the same people we had talked to were in serious survival situations; the fleet experienced 60kt winds and 15m seas and it was through



Entrance to Beaucette Marina

luck and seamanship that there were no casualties, just boat damage. In a perfect WSW3-4 on 19 May we sailed to Darthaven Marina. To come into the Dart river and find the way through all the moored boats, ferry traffic and ships requires concentration and is slightly exciting. It's a really busy place.

The Dart River divides Dartmouth and the little ferry is a 'bridge replacement' and carries people and vehicles on an hourly basis from one side to the other. The strong little tug pulls and pushes the ferry using a very ingenious technique from one side to the other.

Next day we went on a sightseeing tour on an excursion ferry to Totnes.

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The ferry went upriver, past Agatha Christie's house and along beautiful scenery. The man who did the commentary was very funny, entertaining and informative. After arriving in Totnes we walked up the main road, stopped for a coffee and enjoyed the scenery of the old town. We used the open-top bus to Paignton and then took the steam train back to Dartmouth at 1400. It was a great day and a very nice trip.

23 May, we left at 0420 in the dark from Dartmouth to sail to Guernsey. This early hour was dictated by a favourable current that helped us reach our destination 69nm away across the Channel in a shorter time. We had anticipated an average speed of 7.5kts, which would have brought us to Beaucette Marina in Guernsey when the tide was high enough for our 2.5m draft to cross the bar in the entrance of the marina. We were much faster than anticipated and had to take a waiting buoy for more than an hour before we could get into the marina. Ricky, the Marina Manager, and Diana did a great job in making us feel really welcome. The restaurant right next to the Marina office served excellent food. During our stay we visited St. Peter Port several times and realized how crowded the floating docks in the outer harbour became. We were always very happy to return to the peaceful and relaxed Beaucette Marina.

From the Ferry Terminal in St Peter Port it was a short ride with the excursion boat over to the magic island of Herm with its huge sand beaches. Cars and bicycles are banned and time seems to have stopped. We were very lucky since the sun was shining, the temperature was summer-



The weekly market at Lezardrieux

like and the light breeze was just strong enough to blow the sweat off our foreheads and keep us comfortable. It was a perfect *Carpe Diem* day!

Time was flying by and Geoff had to leave again after we had spent ten wonderful days together. Before we left Guernsey, we took a ferry to Sark and tried to enjoy a foggy and rainy day.

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Before growing even more roots we left Beaucette marina on 1 June and



sailed and motor-sailed 54nm to Lezardrieux where we had to tie up to the floating dock in the middle of the Trieux River since there was no place in the marina for us. We took the dinghy across to pay our dues. Without water and

Helmut & Anette on *TAO 4* in Beaucette Marina

electricity we paid

£36 for one night. We were happy to meet our friends Deborah and Simon on their Hallberg-Rassy 37 again and next day we walked up to the Friday market in Lezardrieux and then took a taxi to Paimpol, a city with a very nice downtown and harbour area - well worth a special trip.

The weather forecast gave deteriorating weather with strengthening W winds, so we hurried to make use of the calmer weather and left for Roscoff at 1145 on 6 June. We arrived at 1930 after 58nm of sailing and motor-sailing against the westerly winds. Next day we made an excursion to the Ile de Batz to go on leisurely walks and see the exotic gardens and the lovely beaches. However, when the little ferry arrived it started to rain heavily and we fled into the next bistro only 50m away from the ferry dock.

We were very lucky! The bistro did not look very special but it turned out that they served excellent food and good wine for a reasonable price. We had a nice table at the window, could watch the rain come pelting down and had a 2 1/2



hour banquet, dry and cosy. Next day it was still very poor weather and Sonia and Roland Notley (RCC) invited us for a drink that was most enjoyable.

We woke up to a nasty smell and further investigation led to our two AGM batteries which were boiling hot and the plastic housing was

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melting. We were quite scared that they might catch fire or disintegrate completely. Fortunately a very good company, DOYOT Électricité, got us new ones. Each 65kg battery was a big job to re-install. All this delayed our departure by five days. We put some of this time to good use by making bicycle trips with our Brompton folding bikes, spoiling ourselves with a super dinner at Rackham restaurant (Grand Hotel de la Mer Roscoff) and twice to L'Écume des Jours where we also indulged in three-course dinners. Finally the batteries arrived from the shipper at 1900 and Doyot installed them the same evening.

The sun was shining and we departed Roscoff at 1000 on 14 June for L'Aberwrac'h, only 30nm away. We sailed in very light airs on the scenic route between Ile de Batz and the mainland and arrived at 1430 in L'Aberwrac'h, where we took a buoy. We had a little drink at the sailing club next to the marina office and went for dinner to Le Vioben, which we can highly recommend. During our dinner we decided that we would try to make it to the RCC Brittany Meet in La Roche-Bernard, which was officially to start on 20 June. However, other RCC members had already told us that due to the shortage of rain the lock of the Vilaine river would have certain



Anette up 25m helping to take down the RCC burgee

days when it would not open at all. So, we decided to be at the anchorage at the river mouth, W of Port de Kervoyal on the evening of 17 June.

A very good weather forecast made us decide to use the scenic

but more challenging inside passage from L'Aberwrac'h to Audierne. However, the weather was terrible, with very poor visibility and a big swell running from the west into the rocky island area we had to pass. White, breaking, foaming water started to boil up around us. The navigation was nerve-wracking and our planned scenic tour turned into a very challenging experience. When we got out of the difficult passage the weather started to clear up and a couple of hours later we had blue sky and wonderful, relaxing, fast sailing. By 1640 we moored at a big buoy behind

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the breakwater in front of Audierne.

On 16 June the sun was shining and it was completely calm. We started at 1015 in the direction of Lorient and motored most of the 57nm. As so often during this season dolphins travelled with us and we could not resist



Dinner aboard *TAO 4*

taking more pictures. We arrived in Lorient at 1700 and docked in the Port de Kerneve behind the fuel dock. We had dinner at the Optimist restaurant. The food was good (the goose liver pâté was excellent). Next morning the sun was shining and again there

was no wind. We left at 1000 to motor 37nm towards the Entree de Vilaine. Here we dropped the anchor at 1745, had a swim and a shower on the stern platform, a first this year, and enjoyed a real sundowner - or two. Before we could go up the River Vilaine the next morning we had to take down the burgee, since we had to go underneath some power cables, shown on the chart but with no height indication, just some information that the height is 26-27m. With the burgee up we would be 26m high and with the burgee down 1.2m less. When we tried to take the burgee down it got stuck on top of the mast; this happens nearly every time. Anette had to be pulled up to clear it again. You can imagine how tense the situation was passing underneath the cables; it looked as if we could never clear the wires. Fortunately, we did.

We spent two weeks in La Roche-Bernard, as we enjoyed the RCC Brittany Meet so much. We met old friends and got to know and befriend many new members. At the end of the Meet a 'Safari Dinner' was organized, which means that each boat has to



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host groups of 7-8 people for which the boat crew has to prepare either the appetisers, the main courses or the desserts. There is a time schedule for every course and the group members always change. So by the end of a safari dinner you have met a lot of people and there is a lot of fun. All together we were 25 boats and 75 participants. One can imagine how difficult it is to organise such a safari. We enjoyed this meet tremendously and were very grateful to the organizers who did such a super job.

Since there was a convenient car rental place, we rented a car for a few days and went on sightseeing trips to Vannes and Nantes. The walled town of Vannes is one of Brittany's most attractive sights and a must-see. The city centre is wonderfully maintained and one can breathe the times 500 or 1,000 years ago. If the cobblestones and the old buildings could tell us all about the things they have seen. Our trip to Nantes was a necessity: We had run out of Nespresso capsules and there is a Nespresso store in



La Rochelle

the old city area. These are very important matters: buying a large supply of coffee and going to Fnac, a huge electronics store in downtown Nantes, to buy printer cartridges. We did something for our further education as well and went to the Chateau de Ducs de Bretagne, a large castle and fortress going back to medieval times. Today it is a museum. We did not find it very spectacular. We also took the tram and then a ferry to get across the river Loire to Trentemoult, once a fishing and Cape Horner village and was recommended to us by the Tourist Office 'as a hub of

artistic activity'. We somehow could not find this.

One of the great culinary experiences was the dinner at Les Copains d'abord we had together with Rosemary, Bill, Mary and Guy. We all found it delicious and would have liked to have gone back on another evening. However, after two weeks of partying, eating and drinking, we had to up-root ourselves. So we went to *Talisker* to say good-bye to Bill and Rosemary and to Nick and Marwyn. We four had spent many afternoons

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and evenings together and had great fun-filled times. Looking back we have to say that we were so lucky to make it to the Brittany meet and to get to know so many wonderful people, too numerous to mention here. We are very grateful to have the privilege of being members of the RCC.

3 July, we left La Roche-Bernard early in the morning and sailed to the



Gulf of Morbihan, which is famous for its tides, eddies and currents. We arrived at the entrance in the evening, about one hour before slack water, and our entry was exciting: eddies, overfalls and rushing water all around us. Our

The passage from La Rochelle to Coruña

180hp Volvo engine had to work hard to keep our 32 tons on course. The same situation repeated itself every time when passing islands, going through narrows or shallower areas. There is no room for error. We were meandering around the large gulf in search of an anchorage; it was difficult because every bay and area where current, depth and protection would have made an acceptable anchorage was filled with boats on moorings. Finally we found a spot on the north shore, just west of Arradon. After a leisurely day at anchor and the visit from a Volvo Penta technician who replaced our faulty coolant sensor, we sailed over to the Island of Houat and anchored in the bay of S. Gildas. The Harbour Master told us that anchoring is prohibited, just the use of buoys is allowed. Next day we moved to the south side and dropped the anchor in the Treac'h Salus bay, perfect for the expected NE4.

After arranging a berth in the Port Joinville marina on Ile d'Yeu, we left Houat Island at 0800 on 8 July. During the next three days we used our folding bikes extensively, arranged for a wine delivery from a



Dressed overall in La Rochelle

well-sorted and competent wine dealer about 2km from the marina, found a very good restaurant called Le 09 Rue Georgette, experienced our very first thunderstorm and just had a wonderful time.

By 12 July it was time to sail to La Rochelle. Unfortunately, the weather

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was quite unsettled and the wind forecast was NNW5-7 and decreasing and this meant an uncomfortable downwind sail. Our expectations were met and only after we got well behind the Ile de Ré did the high and steep waves flatten. We had arranged dockage in the Ancien Bassin de Chalutiers and Christian, the very friendly Harbour Master directed us to the Quai d'Honneur. La Rochelle is a lovely place to visit, with lots of history, interesting historical buildings and great pedestrian areas.

One morning in the Bassin a young family on their bicycles stopped and asked us why we had a Brazilian flag in the spreader. Anette, who is Brazilian, immediately responded in Portuguese because she somehow assumed they were Brazilian people. She was right, and it turned out that they, Manoel and Simone, owned an Amel 55 docked not too far away. They invited us for a drink on their boat and there we realized again how small the world is. It turned out that they were good friends of Anthony and Monique Browne (Anthony was Commodore of the RCC until he died in 2009). But now comes the hammer: Manoel's great-uncle had a liaison with Anette's mother in the 1930s in Rio and he was a good friend of the family. What an amazing coincidence! Since Manoel is the representative for AMEL in Portugal, he arranged for a company tour of AMEL and a test sail as well. We were deeply impressed with their top-quality building standards, but also with the cleanliness in the production area and their focus on customer satisfaction. It is the only boat builder we know which has a large basin on its premises where every Amel, before it is delivered to the customer, is tested and also the engine and the generator are run until their first service is due. When a customer gets the boat delivered, it is in sail-away condition. The sail we had was also surprising; the newly designed hull is really quick. Well, one never stops learning. We met William and Suzannah Garnett (RCC) with their Hylas 46 and we had a very entertaining lunch on *TAO 4* before they flew back home.

24 July, we left La Rochelle on Monday at 0645 and had a very fast crossing of 395nm to La Coruña. During the first 24 hours we sailed a distance of 214 miles, an average speed of nearly 9kts. Then the wind dropped and we arrived on 26 July at 0900 at La Coruña.

Antón Pellejero, the RCC Honorary Foreign Representative, was very helpful and showed us the city centre and told us many interesting details about the local history. For example there was María Pita, a kind of Jeanne d'Arc, who was a Galician heroine in the defence of Coruña, northern Spain, against an English attack upon the Spanish mainland in 1589. The place where the Town Hall is situated is named after her. We also met a lovely Swedish couple with their Hallberg Rassy 53 and Helmut was especially happy when it turned out that Hans was a dentist by profession. With the help of a high speed hobby hand-grinder and lots of penicillin he was able to postpone the necessary final dental work until Helmut's

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return home.

From La Coruña we slowly made our way down to Vigo, visiting most of the Ria deltas we had heard so much about. Many sailors spend one or two seasons there, some much longer. The northern part of this area from La Coruña down to Fisterra, or Finisterre, is called La Costa da Morte, the Death Coast. Hundreds, or even thousands, of ships broke up on the countless rocks and shallows along this coastline, and as a consequence



TAO 4 Ashore in Vigo

thousands of seafarers were killed. This coast is often plagued by fog and storms. Today, with radar and GPS we have reduced these dangers drastically. We found that this whole area down to Vigo is very special because of the cold North Atlantic and the southern latitude where the sun is already very strong. This usually means cooler nights and when there is a cloud cover, the temperatures are usually lower. This, we found, is part of the charm of this area. Protected anchorages or marinas are never far when sailing in the Ria deltas and there are wonderful sand beaches and lovely islands like Islas Cies or Isla de Ons. We found there are often anchorages which one can have to oneself, like the one in the bay of Finisterre.

We arrived in Vigo, had lots of sunshine and very little rain and *TAO 4* is now in the marina Punta Lagoa, on land waiting for another lovely sailing season.