

A Change of Plan

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For our 2017 cruise in *Caper* we had intended to return to the west coast of Ireland. Sadly the unexpected demise of our faithful Seadog, Barti, prompted a re-think. France?

The weather in the second week of June was forecast to be, and indeed



was, foul. We hung up our sailing wellies and sought alternative distraction. We set off as soon as it abated. However, as is typical, the more suitable breeze was accompanied by a left-over sea; progress to windward towards St Catherine's was

therefore somewhat slow. We eased our sheets and accepted the prospect of a more easterly French landfall, compounded by the passage's greater exposure to the strong, east-going spring tide. Ultimately even Cherbourg proved to be a struggle, so we bore away for Barfleur, anchoring shortly before 2100 in time to raise a glass to our cruise's first glorious sunset. This unexpected and not previously visited destination, gave rise to what would become the aim for our three weeks afloat; one of visiting new destinations, with perhaps the odd exception.

Tuesday dawned bright and windless. We used the back eddy to round Cap Barfleur and then followed Peter Carnegie's (RCC) guidance* to cheat the tide close in along the shore towards Cherbourg. The tide finally turned and with a sea breeze forthcoming, we stood off and were soon approaching Cap de la Hague. In the light, now following, breeze further assistance was required to push us through the flat, swirling mass of The Alderney Race.



Capreol of Falmouth

Once clear we were able to sail again, but it eventually became obvious that we had missed the tide through the Russel. We altered course and, with a forecast of easterly breezes overnight, headed for Saignie Bay on Sark's west coast where we anchored in solitude, accompanied only by the guillemots with a great view of the sun setting beyond Herm, Jetou and Guernsey in the distance.

Up early, we shot the Gouliot Passage, between Brecqhou and Sark. To the Passage's south we discovered numerous yachts, both moored in Havre Gosselin and anchored in Port es Saies. The wind filled in for a few hours and we gave our mizzen staysail its first airing of the season: our favourite benefit of the yawl rig. The wind proved fickle and by mid-morning we sadly resorted to the engine, leaving Plateau des Roches Douvres to port, continuing towards La Jument des Heaux and the Passe du Nord Est and into the Treguier River. There was sufficient rise of tide for the passe, despite passing RIBs, though we found it quite difficult to make out some of the transits, perhaps in part due to tree growth. Keen to stick to our

cruise's aim, we resisted the temptation to proceed upstream to anchor below the chateau (in easy reach of one of our favoured restaurants), but did so out of the main stream by the Guarivinou buoy instead. The following day's forecast promised a return to strong winds, so we opted to stay for two nights.

The second morning, the Mowlams looked us up as they brought *Fidget* (RCC) downstream, continuing their voyage to meet crew in Roscoff prior to proceeding onwards to the Brittany Meet. The meet had also cropped up on our radar.

However, given our late departure, our need to be in Dartmouth towards the end of June and our desire not to push on relentlessly, we resolved to play it by ear. Having given Hon Sec a suitable head start, we also set off, a tad early, for the west-going tide into a light headwind. They need not have worried; we would never have caught them as our progress, whilst sunny, was slow. We persisted, but aware we would not make Roscoff, unaided, we sought a suitable anchorage. In the settled conditions we briefly considered anchoring overnight off Ile aux Moines, Les Sept Isles, but opted instead for Tregastel-Ste Anne, the prospect of *des moules* or



Gouliot Passage



Tregastel's natural breakwater

des huitres proving too great. A convenient *supermarché* is also at hand. Whilst at HW water this might prove exposed to any swell, this certainly wasn't the case below half tide, as the rocks emerged to provide a breakwater.

Our delayed departure had also deprived us of *Caper's* pre-cruise lift and scrub in the Solent; I therefore donned wet suit and set about scrubbing the waterline. Lower down, strange clumps had appeared over our anodes etc.. We need not venture ashore for moules! All else thankfully proved sound. With little wind and such glorious sunshine, we spent a second night; this was beginning to feel like a summer holiday.

With another beautiful, though windless start, we decided to continue our journey west. Thankfully the sea breeze filled in and we swiftly negotiated Chenal de l'île de Batz with a fair tide, under genoa and mizzen

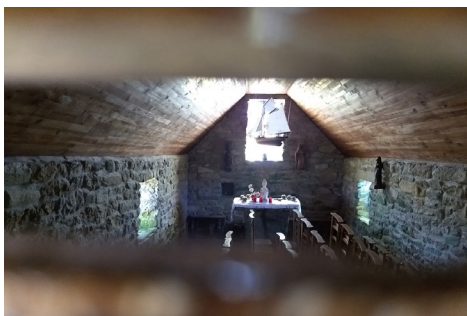
staysail. Approaching the Ile Vierge lighthouse the favourable tide was failing. Having consulted PC's excellent tome* once more, we bore away, entered the Chenal de la Malouine and having past Grand Pot du Beurre



Ile de Sein

enjoyed a fine fetch up towards L'Aberwrac'h. Breaking our new rule, we picked up a mooring and headed straight for an excellent supper at *Ty Billig ar Mor*. Our supermarché visit in Tregastel had thankfully removed the need for the slog up the big hill to the village of Landeda.

The settled conditions persisted, as did our succession of early starts and we headed towards Le Four light house in time to catch the favourable southbound tide. Progress was painfully slow but it was progress none the less and it was interesting comparing our close, inshore approach with those that proceeded further offshore; ours appeared just to pay off. At



Through the keyhole, Ile de Sein's chapel.

last we entered the Chenal du Four. In the sunshine Ouessant and Ile de Molène glinted in the distance, but by the time I'd considered altering course for the latter we were being whisked down past Le Conquet. Where to? Camaret, no, we've been before; Morgat, too far; Feunteun, too late for the Raz de Sein. Our aim was

new destinations and the weather being beautifully settled, we altered course for Ile de Sein. Approaching via the north channel we discounted anchoring in the shallower depth close to the mole, and opted instead to do so where the *vedette* mooring is shown. In reality it is somewhat to the south-east of the charted position. The bottom consisted of good holding between patches of unhelpful kelp. It was a beautiful spot in the prevailing conditions, only

spoilt by the aforementioned kelp rotting on the beach to windward of us. Two nights were decided upon and the following morning we ventured



Men Brial, Ile de Sein

a beautiful little chapel, the latter situated by the lighthouse. We selected our restaurant and later, after the last *vedette* had departed, returned for an excellent meal ashore.

Our second morning presented a surprise. Having popped my head out of the forehatch, I found I could see nothing, not even the yacht that had anchored less than 50m inshore of us the previous evening. This was not only a shock but an inconvenience: a shock, as I had assumed that such a substantial lighthouse would surely have a foghorn. It was an inconvenience, as we needed to proceed across to the mainland with a favourably slack tide in the Raz. We resigned ourselves to another day at anchor, in what occasionally cleared to sunny, settled conditions. We were able to take advantage of the slackening tide that evening. The question was, where to?

On 21 June we theoretically had maximum daylight, though the mist/fog was never far away and likely to return as dusk approached. We had considered that we might head for Anse de St Nicholas, just east of Cap de la Chevre. On our way, given the forecast of light WSW winds, we thought a suitable anchorage east of the Raz on the north coast of the peninsula might be more appropriate.

This led us to visit Baie de Brezellec some 4.5nm east. Tucked behind a headland it is not only shown on the chart as an anchorage, but also as *Acces Plongeur*; this second attribute



Fog hornless!

nearly became pertinent. It is a pretty little spot with a mass of moorings for small, local, fishing craft, a hoist to move their catch up the steep cliff and

an approach road that most vehicles can tackle only in reverse. We found a vacant area in a suitable depth, inshore of the moorings and dropped our hook. We had a very peaceful night and were delighted to observe in the morning that the locals work collectively, ferrying each other to and from



Baie de Brezellec's hoist

Mate, and our second attempt proved successful. More pleasingly our mooring strop came up with the anchor, the latter's tip showing signs of having been stuck under a rock. I proffered a bottle of our finest plonk but they cheerfully declined.

Free from our bonds, we set off for Morgat with an excellent fetch across the Baie de Douarnenez. Content that we'd declined forging further south, we enjoyed an escort of mini-transats returning from their rounding of the Fastnet Rock. Having anchored, on the thankfully clean sands of the Anse de Morgat, we reprovisioned at the more-than-adequate, local supermarché just off the beach, thus avoiding the long walk up the hill to Crozon. The beachfront also provided a selection of restaurants from which to choose for supper.



Fouled anchor saviours!

Two kite-surfers escorted us during our following day's broad reach across to Douarnenez. These weren't just any ordinary kite surfers, but of the foiling type. Not content with buzzing us at break neck speed, they cheerfully waved as they did so.

On arrival, Douarnenez was *en fête* as a result of the return of the Fastnet Mini fleet. We therefore discounted going alongside the Treboul pontoon and went in search of a suitable place to anchor outside. The south-west wind was bringing a bit of a send around to the eastern side of Ile Tristan so we continued to the anchorage shown off Port du Rosemeur. Unsurprisingly this was similarly crowded with moorings, not to mention pot markers, however, as it was the First Mate's birthday, we persisted and found a suitable spot. That evening we went ashore and had a fantastic meal overlooking the bay, followed by a roam through the streets over to Port-Rhu, upstream of the sill. On balance on our next visit we will chose to anchor in the same spot.

It was time to head north, but where to? We'd enjoyed our island experience on the Ile de Sein and recalled the appealing sight of Ouessant and Ile Molène on our earlier trip south. With a little too much west in the south-west wind, we beat out towards Cap de la Chevre into a F3-4, ocassionally 5. Having rounded the headland, most accompanying yachts bore away, presumably for Camaret or up through the Chanel du Four. We eased our sheets just a tad, and, bearing in mind the changing tide, headed offshore towards the Pierres Noires in order to approach Ile Molène via the passage between it and Ile de Quemenes, rather than stemming the tide by crossing from Le Conquet. The plan worked well and by early evening we'd managed to find sufficient depth in which to anchor just west of the lifeboat, the moorings not being an option with our 2.2m draught and approaching spring tides. Having enjoyed supper on board, we turned in, leaving our exploration of the island until the morning.



Foiling kite surfer

Calculations proved reliable and nothing thankfully went bump in the night. We set off ashore, confident that, as the vedette is unable to berth towards LW, nothing was likely to upset the status quo. Ile Molène is a small though lovely island and appeared to have a strong sense of community, which is no mean feat given that it's frequently cut off by storms in winter. A fleet of small, mostly traditional boats, had ventured over from Le Conquet and were enjoying a 'pique-nique' at the lifeboat shed. The central feature is the historic semaphore tower with its small museum commemorating the efforts of the islanders to help the *Drummond Castle* as it sank in 1896. Lunch options early in the season were limited, so we partook of Molène *sausage et frites*, though during our subsequent walk we found more elaborate fare was available. After lunch we motored across to Lampaul on Ouessant, leaving by Chenal Nord-Ouest de Molène

and potentially a little early for its tide.

On approach to La Jument lighthouse we were surprised by how confused the sea was given the windless, slack-water conditions. Nevertheless, we safely rounded it and were soon established on the transit up Baie de Lampaul. PC's guidance* is spot on, in that the conditions at the head of the Baie are surprisingly calm; we would not have put money on that as

we entered it. We picked up one of the plentiful, free mooring buoys and enjoyed a peaceful night in the company of half a dozen or so other yachts of varying sizes.

The following morning two of our neighbours left. One yacht heading anti-clockwise, the other, a Swiss aluminium yacht of about 45ft, clockwise around the island. Meanwhile we ventured ashore via the lifeboat slipway and walked up to the small town by way of the drying harbour of Porz Pol. We found a useful collection of eateries, shops and a small supermarché supported by a varied collection of homes and second homes, in a varying states of repair. Some of



Ile Molène's Semaphore Tower

their recycling was pure genius. Declining to rent a bike from one of the numerous rental establishments, we stretched our legs in the direction of the Creac'h lighthouse. En route we spotted the Swiss yacht motoring purposefully along the north shore, negotiating the overfalls, towards Ile de Keller. I couldn't resist checking her progress on my AIS app, the results of which saw me resolve to route via the Passage de Fromveur at slack water the following day.

Supper ashore at *Le Fromveur* didn't disappoint and after a restful night we left Lampaul around lunchtime and setting off towards a re-match with Le Jument. What a difference a day makes. The sea was smooth, and as we proceeded along the south coast the tide became favourable.

Shortly we found ourselves rounding the Men-Korn beacon and heading up towards Port du Stiff's free moorings, under the watchful gaze of both the Ouessant Traffic Control Radar Tower and Brittany's first lighthouse Le Phare du Stiff. The conditions were kind as regards the lack of swell,



La Jument lighthouse

John Lancaster-Smith

but we later lost sight of both the radar tower and the lighthouse as the cloud descended.

Unfortunately Port du Stiff is not blessed with mobile reception, though unusually our NAVTEX now sprung back into life. With a promise of the wind becoming W/ NW F3-4 increasing 5 at times, we set our alarm for first light for our crossing to Dartmouth.

We were a tad disappointed to wake to a flat calm. We hoisted our mainsail and caught the east-bound tide along the Brittany coast, slowly also achieving some



Waste not, want not! Lampaul

northing. Five hours into the passage we hoisted the mizzen and unfurled the genoa, though it was another couple of hours before we could sail without assistance on our fetch towards Dartmouth. Within a further two hours, with a possible squall approaching, we'd tucked a reef in the main, three hours later a second and after a further eighty minutes a third. The tide having now turned, our track became more northerly and we approached the shipping lanes.



John and Tracey at Porz Pol, Ouessant

Whilst we by no means rely solely upon it, isn't AIS great? Previously the fact that a huge bulk-carrier, doing 20kts, was staying on a constant bearing would have driven me nuts. That we could now see that the offending target is making good the same SOG as ourselves, changed the whole dynamic. We altered course and were soon through the traffic, whereas

previously the scenario's resolution would have been painfully slow.

The wind continued to strengthen and back; with it the sea built and now approached beam on. We dropped the main, put a few rolls in the genoa, hardened up slightly, to avoid the occasional dousing, and reset the mizzen, the other benefit of our yawl rig. As darkness fell and in persistent rain, we were still making excellent progress. Approaching

midnight, eleven hours after switching off the engine and despite solar/wind generated power, we noticed that the battery voltage was too low. This was odd. The batteries were not that old, have a large capacity and our monitor showed we'd only consumed 11%. We started the engine to replenish them and within 20 minutes the charging amps had dropped right off and having switched off the engine, they stabilised at 13.3V: further investigation required on arrival.

Meanwhile the noise of the engine had been masking the source of the random red lights the First Mate had spotted in the sky. We're not great ones for monitoring the VHF, however, once on, their source became obvious: Royal Navy helicopters flying off *HMS Ocean*, which subsequently appeared on our AIS. I was glad to note that as she was underway, we were in fact downwind of her. This ensured that the various calls she made to ward off civilian traffic, were not directed at us.

The loom of Start Point appeared. We were somewhat earlier than I'd anticipated. The sea moderated as we passed our waypoint at around 0130. We altered course across Start Bay to our destination, arriving alongside a vacant, deep-water pontoon in Dartmouth. It was 22½ hours after our departure, with 150nm on the log and 132nm notched up on the GPS: not a bad day's work.

The following days were spent cleaning ship inside and out, with a long-overdue lift and scrub to remove the offending *moules*. We then ventured to Dittisham for a couple of nights and explored Agatha Christie's Greenway House before returning *Caper* to the deep-water pontoon where we left her for the week. We drove home for a few day's work, returning on the eve of the Classic Channel Regatta. Now that's another story....

*Peter Carnegie, *RCCPF Pilot - Channel Islands, Cherbourg Peninsula & North Brittany* (2015)