

All Islands of the UK and Ireland to Port

Jason Lawrence

Awarded the Founder's Cup

A boat for a mission or a mission for a boat?

We had completed a big adventure on a bigger boat, but now needed something smaller and more manageable for home waters. In July 2016 I travelled to Breskens to pick up *Slamat*, a Sparkman and Stephens Sagitta 35, and start a new chapter in our sailing adventures.

With continental cruising complete *Slamat* came ashore for a refit and by late May 2017 she was ready for action. Having sailed through the islands it seemed logical to sail around the islands we call home. A 'round Britain and Ireland' sounded good, 'all the islands of the UK and Ireland to Port' sounded better. Only later did I realise Rockall would be part of the plan.

Over the winter I read *Roving Commissions* logs, in particular about the west coast of Ireland, and bought books on sailing around the UK.

I enjoyed fireside reading and thinking of the route and what sort of trip to expect. It seemed the jury was out on which way to approach the route. I knew I would want to be offshore, not stopping before I had miles under the keel and found the rhythm of offshore



sailing which I so enjoy. We planned to cruise the south-west of Ireland as a family, so definitely wanted to have the bulk of the trip astern before that. In addition I would prefer to be chasing tide up the channel with longer spells of fair than foul.

Counter-clockwise it would be.

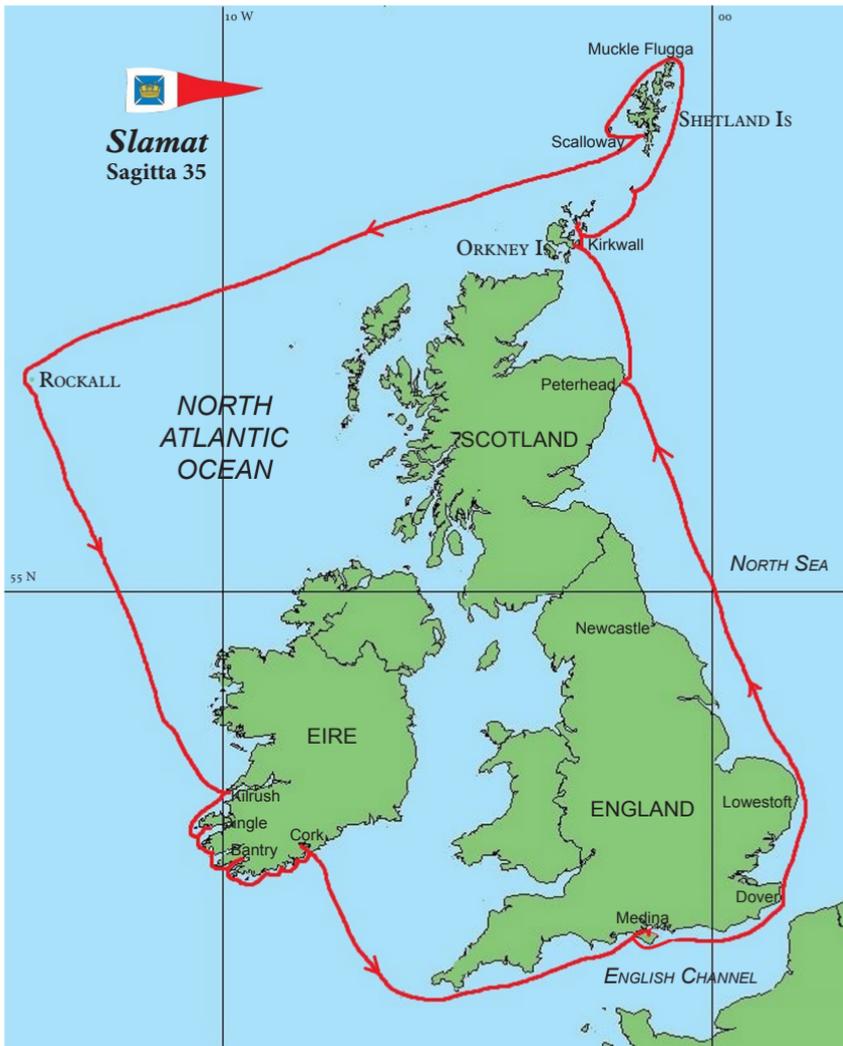
With the weather improving, departure was set for Saturday 10 June. After a last dinner at home Amanda and the boys took me down to the Folly with a cool bag and my oilies. Farewells and a water bus up the

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Medina saw me on board *Slamat* and reality bit. In the still of the evening, I considered the moment and what I was setting out to do. I settled down to sleep, thoughtful about the coming day and how *Slamat* would perform post-refit.

I woke excited. Engine on, kettle on, thermos full, Lavazza in mug, time to go. At 0230 I slipped lines, motored gently through a sleeping Cowes and turned left at the Squadron. In thinking about the route, I wanted to have the Isle of Wight to port at the start of the trip, so hoisted the main with a precautionary reef and motored west down the Solent.

By 0700 I was abeam St Cats with SW F4, fair tide and perfect conditions.



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The new 95% jib was pulling well, but with easing conditions and clocking wind I launched the reacher, my solution for lighter winds aft of abeam. The tide turned against and after lunch in the sun, I caught an hour's sleep. I had organised *Slamat* for single-handed sailing and fitted an AIS unit. Not only does it transmit my position, it relays all GPS, AIS and instrument data wirelessly to my phone and tablet. I can set up different profiles for alarms if any AIS signal enters the profile. However, it won't



Off to Dover

wake me for non-AIS obstructions such as yachts, buoys and sneaky fishing boats.

Dinner in the cockpit, sunset off Dungeness; all was well and I felt good after a beautiful day at sea. Once past Dover things would become

more testing. With shallow water, compressing tidal flows, difficult navigation and shipping in closer proximity I would need to be alert. With few opportunities to sleep I had worried about this next 100 miles, past East Anglia and into the North Sea. Although the tide and wind conditions were perfect I opted for rest and with Dover approaching, remembered the outer harbour offered a good anchorage.

Nearing the harbour I called Dover Port Control. I was a little shocked when they said that the anchorage was closed. This was a serious let-down as I was already thinking about the comforts of my sleeping bag! Thanking them for the information, I motored on, resigned to taking on the East Coast tired. Five minutes later they called to say they could escort me to a suitable spot. What a relief! I made the harbour entrance through a violent cross tide, and was lead to a dark corner of the harbour, 7m mud, perfect.

Waking refreshed to a SW F4-5 forecast, at 1000 I headed out of the harbour, ready for a busy day on the East Coast. By 1230 the wind had increased to 18kts. With two reefs in we were past the Goodwin Sands in quite roly conditions. The wind was getting up as we made our way, reaching and running, through the sand bars and wind farms. Across the Thames estuary and up the coast of East Anglia conditions were changing. It was rough in the south, with talk of F6-7, and ahead was looking tough with 25+kts on the nose past the Wash in 12 hours. After that it looked like great conditions up to Fair Isle. I considered pulling in to Lowestoft, but knew breaking the rhythm would be a mistake. Once through the next day all would be well. The barometer started dropping. At sundown the wind came in. In a moment I put two further reefs in with half jib. At

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0120, 12 June I logged my furthest east position of 001.56E, and started to put more west in the course.

'0300 hardened up, close-hauled with 3 reefs in and half jib, making 310°.'

My wind indicator read 16kts true, but I started to think that was seriously wrong. I was concerned; having taken weight out of *Slamat*, had I made her too tender? What would I do when we got 25 or 35kts? I had little left to reef. Looking out to sea the wind was at least 25kts; something was amiss with the anemometer. We had to make certain gates to windward, around Haisborough Sands and through wind farms, so it was tough going. There was plenty of shipping about, adding to the action. With foul tide it was slow progress to windward in rough seas.

Slamat was going well but taking a lot of water over her decks. I was aware that there were a few window leaks, one directly onto the chart table of course. I marked them for later attention. Another wind farm to avoid on Sheringham shoal. The seas were lumpy, steep, turbulent and sharp, but without deep oceanic power. I was looking forward to deeper water and a more settled sea state.

'0900 massive broadside, got to be F7 now, 3 reefs and tiny jib, 3m seas and well-heeled over, shipping about and not very pleasant.'

That was about the worst of it. By lunchtime the reefs were out and I had a full jib. I busied myself mending a few bits. The tool drawer had launched across the cabin and smashed, the tiller nuts needed attention and Sven, the wind vane, needed rerigging. After a tidy up I had a rewarding lunch.

Earlier it had been Dungeness and Sizewell nuclear plants, then the wind farms, now the gas rigs of the southern North Sea. Books I had read all mentioned gas flares lighting up the night sky, but now the rigs looked deserted, rusty with absolutely no gas flares. The rigs brought the first real bird life and I noted the bull-necked, gliding gulls that I learned were Fulmars. What graceful animals, beautiful and effortless going about their business, showing casual interest in *Slamat* as they glided by; they would be my companions right round the UK.

The afternoon's steady wind and deepening water bought more comfortable conditions and with less shipping about I managed to sleep. *Slamat* was feeling much better and so was I. We could expect a good run north with moderate conditions. I was finding my feet again and feeling more intuitive about sail settings and navigation. We were just inside the Dogger Bank and I was surprised there were no fishing boats about.

'0400 somewhere off Newcastle. 14°C in the cabin. I just didn't compute that it would be colder up here. I need to buy a blanket.'

During the morning the wind eased and backed. I played with the idea of launching the 150% genoa, but opted for the reacher which pulled

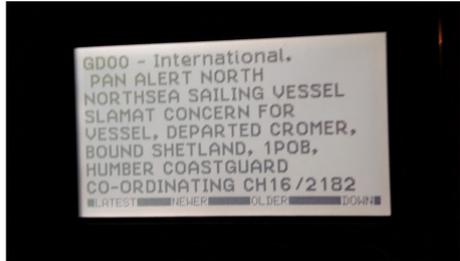
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nically with 7kts on the dial. Suddenly there was action about. Four jets flew in two formations overhead; off in the distance, was that a seal diving; guillemots all over the place, gannets and gulls, at last some active wildlife. The water had changed to a beautiful turquoise colour. With *Slamat* sailing balanced and fast, all was well. The sky was changing with cirrus clouds developing, the sunshine was doomed, change was coming.

I spent a while reprogramming the Navtex and was now receiving good weather info for northern waters. The forecast looked good with SSW F3-5 until a change on Friday. I would be well tucked up in the Shetlands by then. It was 21°C on board, somewhere off Edinburgh and all was good. Around 1900 it looked wet ahead. I doused the reacher only for the wind to ease. Reacher back up and after an hour the rain started. Reacher down, wet and exactly what I didn't need. I am particular about keeping the boat dry; having a wet sail below is never good. *Slamat* was a bit underpowered, but it looked like a squally night, so we had the right sail setup.

Deciding to check the Navtex before sleep, I sat down and scrolled to the latest report. There was an alert.

It was me, but why? Was something wrong at home? Why were they worried? Either way I felt this significant. Deciding I had to make shore to see what



was going on I looked at the chart to see Peterhead as my best option some 70nm north-east. I started motor-sailing towards Peterhead with an ETA of around 1000. The vessel *Nao Provider* was headed to Aberdeen and would cross my path about 4nm ahead. I would make contact by handheld VHF. I kept trying and on occasion heard calling which I thought mentioned *Slamat*. I then caught the end of a broadcast from another vessel mentioning *Slamat*, but could not make contact with her. I finally contacted *Nao Provider* who kindly agreed to relay a message to Humber coastguard that all was well on board and *Slamat* was headed to Peterhead. After a good series of power naps, at 0400 the wind freshened and we could sail. I slept again to be woken by the handheld VHF talking about *Slamat*. Reception was intermittent and it was definitely un-nerving.

Turning on the FM radio I listened in horror to an eye whitening account of a tragedy. An Australian was describing his view of a tower block fire, seeing mobile phone lights shining out of windows on the upper floors. He said there was no way out for them, the fire was on the second and third floors and growing, consuming each floor as he spoke. It was a horrific description and it became apparent this was not a historic report, but the actual event unfolding in London: the Grenfell Tower fire.

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It was the most harrowing eyewitness description of unfolding calamity and certain tragedy. How utterly terrible.

At 0600, land ahoy. It would not be long before phone reception and clarity. After calling Humber coastguard, it transpired that my AIS signal had dropped out off Cromer. Ashore people were tracking me on AIS. With no signal, bad weather and tricky navigation, concern was raised with the coastguard. It's difficult. A lost signal may be alarming, but is quite frequent. When alarm is raised, a chain of action is set in motion. Although I did not understand why Navtex was used, I did understand that there was concern for my safety, for which I was grateful.

At 1100 14 June I was alongside. The marina was fairly empty, easy to access and in a lovely bay in the corner of the large harbour. I walked into town for lunch and supplies. The AIS and VHF installations needed checking. With luck I found the man in Peterhead who could help me. On answering the phone he said, 'Eyyyyy, so you're the one everyone is looking for.' Within two hours he was aboard with his meters and discovered all was in order. The AIS signal was good, but third party software broadcasting to the internet was at fault. The fixed VHF issues we put down to low battery voltage, so I arranged for fitting new batteries the following day.

At 0545 Friday 16 June I made my way out of Peterhead harbour headed for Kirkwall. The W-SW F4 winds were perfect for a course of about 350°. After a lovely day's sail, at 2130 I hardened up into Stronsay Firth. By luck the tide was with as I made my way towards Kirkwall. With fading light I entered Inganess Bay and, with salmon farming marked on the chart, carefully moved to the west side and shallow water, perfect protection from forecast stronger SW winds. Finding a lovely spot, the Bay of Berstane, I dropped the hook after a great day at sea.

The following morning I made my way into Kirkwall. With a small cruise ship in port, the town was busy with people. I had lunch ashore and bought a few supplies, finding a moment to reflect that only a week ago I had left Cowes. We live on a very small island.

I went over and said hello to *Zwailer*, another RCC vessel. Remarkably they had come from Cowes as well. 'Oh, you're the *Slamat* everyone was looking for!' We had drinks together the following day before both moving off into the islands. Stronger winds had blown through, so I decided to spend a night at anchor. With brisk wind and strong tides I made my way up through the islands to a small anchorage between the Island of Eday and the Calf of Eday. Both visitor moorings being taken, I anchored and ate dinner on deck in the majesty of a peaceful anchorage and dimming light.

Checking messages there were a couple of notes saying that I had missed some islands. I had planned to nip through the top of the Orkney

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group to Fair Isle, quite forgetting that I would have passed islands to starboard. Oh dear, I would have to go back. I set the alarm for an early rise and went to bed. I woke early but with no alarms. Looking out, things seemed a little strange. The boats on the visitor moorings looked further away. I went up on deck to see that we had dragged anchor right across Calf Sound. It looked like we were steady, but half a mile from where we should have been.

I prepared *Slamat* to leave. Conditions were moderate and at 0345 I pulled up the anchor to retrace our steps to the Stronsay Firth. Heavy kelp had fouled the anchor, the cause and remedy of our anchor drag. At 0600 I passed to the south of Auskerry, gybed and headed north-east: back on track, Orkney to port.

The morning was spent shaking out reefs as the wind eased, by



Auskerry

lunch carrying full sail. Out of the lee of Orkney I could feel the Atlantic swell for the first time. It felt strong and I recalled Atlantic weather in times past. There was plenty of bird life about and, passing south of Fair Isle, a great skua flew past, quite fantastic. By 1500 Tuesday 20 June I was tied up in the small harbour in Fair Isle. I spent a moment contemplating the weather and a plan.

There was some big wind coming in on Friday 24 June. If I planned to make Ireland by 1 July, I would need to start the Rockall leg after that blow. I needed a suitable harbour for shelter, boat service, crew service and a good starting point for the Rockall leg. Scalloway seemed the best option. I needed to leave in the morning.

Fair Isle is renowned for its knitwear designs. An hour's walk and discussions with locals, brought me to the hat shop house, Burkle. I met Hollie who explained how their knitwear is made. She had some fantastic items, real works of art. On reflection I am sorry that I did not buy more than one for Amanda and a fisherman's kep for myself, both super warm and things of beauty. I bought in traditional colours, explained as any colour you would expect to see a sheep wearing.

The forecast was for moderate SE winds in the morning, strengthening, then clocking the following morning to the SSW. If I left early, I could head up the east coast of Shetland, make it over the top and most of the way down the west coast before head winds: a tough call but worth going for.

I was at away at 0730, water temperature 11.1°C and pretty cold. I steered

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035°, bound for Shetland and up the east coast. The barometer had started to drop. *Slamat* moved well in the SSE winds. By 1400 the wind was rising and I put in the second reef. With wind against tide the sea got up with plenty of white water. Cold and a bit shaken up in the yawing motion, I knew I had to push



Fair Isle Harbour

on and get over the top before the wind clocked. The day drew on, the wind increased and the seas became bigger. I looked at my options. I could shelter in Balta Sound for a tide, or push on over the top. The entrance to Balta Sound looked narrow and with the sea running directly into the mouth, it looked like a dangerous entrance. If I carried on, it would be wind against tide with possible Atlantic swell, in a potentially nasty place. However, with luck I could be in the lee of Shetland by early morning with fair winds, then head winds later in the afternoon. The barometer was falling a point an hour, really quite windy and rough. I decided it was safer to continue and keep offshore, out of the really aggressive headland tide, and hope for the best.



Muckle Flugga

At 2000 I called Shetland coastguard asking for expected sea conditions. Nothing untoward was reported, so all good. I carried on north and at 2310 gybed onto port tack, my northern most

point done at 60.54N. The wind had started to ease and conditions were moderating. There was no sign of the Atlantic swell, just mist, rain and a semi-twilight on the day of the summer solstice, sunset 2231, sunrise 0327.

At 2340 I was abreast of Muckle Flugga light, the rock unseen. Then for 10 minutes the mist and cloud lifted and there she was, a dark silhouette in the half light of midnight, quite stunning.

I made my way south-west with much improved sea as the lee-effect took

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hold and the wind eased. Over the early morning I shook out reefs and put them back. With the wind clocking I was hard pressed, but making the headlands and sleeping in between. All was well apart from a 15-minute escapade when I flicked my trusty thermos coffee mug overboard which, by some miracle, I managed to retrieve using engine and boat hook.

The wind died off and by 0900 I was at the Ve Skerries with very turbulent seas, but a fair tide - not a nice place to be in any weather. Bearing away, I motor-sailed to Scalloway and entered the sheltered bay to find a nice looking T pontoon. I came alongside the hammerhead, bow to the west and the expected gales.

Amazingly, as I was making fast to the dock I received a message from my brother in Dubai with a picture of *Slamat* arriving in Scalloway! Someone had photographed my arrival and posted the image of the vessel under the AIS/MMSI identification software. What a weird world we live in.

The wind started blowing and on the morning of the 24 June I noted my max wind strength at 28kts. I approached my three neighbours whose indicators read 38, 40 and 41. *Slamat's* was definitely under-reading as suspected.

The wind howled for two nights. The long-term gribbs had looked bad, but were starting to look better for the next leg. By Saturday morning I knew I had a window to Ireland. If I left on Sunday afternoon I should have great reaching conditions out to Rockall, with the wind backing on Wednesday for a stonking run down to Ireland. The latter part of the week looked windy, but if I could get south I would have easier conditions, maybe only F7-8. I couldn't hope for a better forecast, so stowed last minute provisions, showered and went out to dinner before a great night's sleep.

On the morning of the 25 June the wind suddenly eased; it was over. At 1530 I headed out. It was still windy, rough with a 3m swell, but I expected conditions to ease. With Radio 2 coverage of Glastonbury and Barry Gibb live, I was off to Rockall, 405nm, 2 days 9 hours and 35 minutes away, apparently.

I knew the general position of Rockall, but there were a few discrepancies between sources. Reeds also mentioned Helens reef, 2nm ENE of the rock, breaking heavily, so I wanted to stay clear of that. I plotted a course 5 miles north of the northern supposed position, to drop down on it when I got there. Being a renowned squid area I was hoping to see a few fishing boats trawling between rock and reef.

I was leeward of Foula by 1800 and watched the orange glow of the dying sun expectant of a better day ahead. With the barometer rising and the miles ticking by I spent a busy night increasing sail and by 1000 was flying the reacher and back up to speed. A good cooked breakfast was well

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received and as the day progressed the wind dropped right off. I started the engine and motored slowly on course, topping up the batteries and fridge.

The conditions were resetting and the Navtex was talking NE3-4 increasing 5. I could now see the islands of Rona and Sula Sgeir 15nm to



Windy in Scalloway

the south. The water had turned a jade green, with plenty of bird life about and a fishing boat to port.

In early evening and the wind filled. We were sailing again, reacher up, gybing downwind. With more wind expected I set up the pole to goose-wing

the jib. A little adjustment and all was stable and balanced. Sven loved it and was working well. With the morning light came breakfast, bacon and eggs. I had a shave to freshen up and dug out my purchases from Lerwick. I had bought a pair of Icelandic woollen socks which were looking very appealing. I put them and my boots back on. With steady winds we were pushing on well, 180nm to Rockall.

‘Wind astern, moderate F5 couldn’t ask for better.’

Steady conditions over the day saw good sailing. Looking around it was dark and rainy to starboard, clear and bright to port. *Slamat* was in a great spot, on the edge of the cloud and dry. We had 100nm to go. The wind backed and with waves from the north the motion was quite roly. I was starting to feel the discomfort of the motion, as well as exposed and alone.

Of course at that moment the AIS alarm sounded. Ship ahead on an exact reciprocal course, fish in the scupper and a lone fulmar, not alone at all. The sea had changed. It seemed younger, unregulated, unpredictable, changing direction, slapping the hull. I saw 20+ on the dial, time for the third reef, 27nm to Rockall.

‘Much more white water about, aquamarine seas with pearl white crests, beautiful and powerful. Quite magical. Couple of big broadsides, water over the cockpit, spray all over the place. I am down below. . . great.’ Bird life increased and at 1430 I had a ship on the AIS. Ten minutes later I could see the rock with lots of birds everywhere and three fishing boats. At 1500 I gybed and headed south. The west was done at 013.42W. The wind eased, the sun was out and the waves astern. By 1530 we were abreast Rockall in beautiful conditions, and heading off to the Shannon, 329nm away. The depth sounder touched 75m by the rock, but was now off the scale. We had been close enough thank you.

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The wind and seas started building in the afternoon. With big breaking seas growling 5ft from the cockpit. It was all a little scary, so I retired below. It was a rough, noisy night, but with no shipping about *Slamat* made good progress south.

The morning's weather forecast was a bit scratchy, with F8 in both Rockall and Shannon. The waves came abeam as the wind backed. The seas were big and the motion uncomfortable but *Slamat* was making miles. We were racing down towards the Shannon, 180 miles to go. Still in the deep water it looked like we would pass onto the shelf in a compression area. The seas would get bigger.

With the wind really up, I looked for ways to shorten sail. I tried pulling the main in, and that was effective. We were definitely more comfortable. By 2130 the sea bed was rising and the waves were big and steep, hissing white foam blowing off the top. The Navtex indicated that the gale was in Malin and expected Shannon. I was in Malin and headed into Shannon. It looked like the big wind was 50nm ahead, but going away. How lucky.



Rockall

We were just coming up on the shelf with three trawlers right on my track. I was pretty tired and being goose-winged, limited in my ability to manoeuvre. I called on the VHF without response. One boat was stationary and time was running out for a gentle course alteration. I called explaining my situation, asking for intentions. At that point he started moving and turning out of my track. Great, no need to go beam on, or gybe. The seas were large. I was cold, damp and tired with the motion and was looking forward to a change. I had been lucky with the weather. It felt the worst was over and the conditions would moderate.

'1000 Gone are the hissing waves of last night, the sinister nature of the chase. Today the waves seem much smaller and less threatening. Sunshine always helps.'

'1130 Land ahoy. Slyne head spotted through the haze.'

We were on course and making good way. The wind eased and after lunch I took out the third reef, it was over.

'1930 Gybe into the Shannon. What an evening, beautiful sunshine, F4 sailing downwind in the calm waters of the Shannon, dolphins.'

I made a call to Amanda that all was well and by 2300 had the anchor down behind Scatterry Island. I felt relief to have arrived in Ireland after a great sail and could enjoy some rest before Amanda and the boys arrived. The following morning I locked safely into Kilrush marina. Lunch

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ashore and relaxation was the prescription. The motion of the last leg had taken its toll and I was exhausted. Kilrush is a lovely small town with a well-equipped marina and friendly staff. I spent three days resting and preparing *Slamat* for the family.

The Williams arrived in the marina to continue their cruise on *Seaway*. Having seen the RCC burgee they came over to say hello. *Seaway* had cruised north up the Irish coast last season and planned to head over to Scotland and through the Caledonian canal. After spending the winter in Kilrush she was now in the water ready for action. The following day

we got together to share notes and that afternoon they left. I was impressed with the speed of their commissioning and the skill of their daughter as she manoeuvred *Seaway* out of the dock and through the lock.



Shannon ahoy!

They looked like they were going to have a great family adventure.

Amanda and the boys arrived at the marina Wednesday 5 July. I was delighted to see them. They quickly made themselves at home and settled onto *Slamat* for three weeks cruising. We ventured out of the marina the following day and spent a night at anchor at Carrigaholt Bay. Monopoly followed fresh mackerel for dinner, great fun. We all slept well and in the mild conditions of the morning sailed across the entrance of the Shannon into Smerwick harbour. The boys swam. At 15°C it was a little cold for me, and we went ashore for a good walk.

Sailing around the Blasket Islands to port we made into Dingle. It had been a hot and sunny afternoon and with lots of sea life we were all happy. We discovered that Dingle is the most visited town in Ireland, busy and full of tourists.

The following days were spent slowly making our way around the coast, past stunning scenery and secluded bays. We anchored in Ventry Harbour, then made our way out past the Skelligs and into Derrynane, up to Glengarriff and on to Bantry. The boys filled their days with swimming and exploring in the dinghy, cards and monopoly at night, and each day we pushed on a little towards our goal of Cork.

In the early morning mist we sailed out of Bantry Bay and into the Atlantic. In the mild reaching conditions there was plenty of sea life: birds and dolphins. We made our way out past the Fastnet Rock, unseen in the mist, and on to Castletownshend. Picking up a buoy in the river

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we enjoyed the peace of the harbour after a long day at sea. The weather would change soon and it felt good to be in striking distance of Cork.

After a morning walk we set off for Glandore. It was a glorious day and we anchored off the beach, the boys ashore and Amanda and I reading our books in the cockpit. That evening we motored over to Unionhall for a very good meal ashore. Deciding to use the weather to push east, we headed off some 20nm to Courtmacsherry. The entrance is pretty shallow, and arriving at the wrong state of the tide we carefully made over the bar and into the estuary. We did go aground but a local boat came past and we followed him, much closer to the moorings to port, and found good water all the way to the pontoon. The boys swam off the dock in the evening sunshine before garlic prawns for dinner, cards, then bed. The following day found us sailing past the Old Head of Kinsale and up into the marina for a few days while the wind blew.

Kinsale was fantastic. With a great marina and club facilities we enjoyed our stay. We walked to the King Charles fort, ate more good meals ashore and enjoyed the local beach. Eating breakfast on our final morning we had the pleasure of meeting Brian Smullen who came over and said hello. He had the beautiful ketch, *Cuilaun*, moored on the outer pontoon. Returned from Cowes, he was heading to Glandore for a local regatta. We wished him well and packed up ready to head to Cork.



With moderate conditions and stern winds we were alongside the pontoon right in the heart of Cork by 1500.

Family cruising . . . happy days

Amanda and the boys were leaving the following day. We had all enjoyed our time on *Slamat*. Being a family aboard again is such fun and leads to an intimacy that is seldom found on land. I would miss them all. We explored Cork, packed bags, had dinner ashore, cards before bed and the following afternoon walked to the bus station and said our goodbyes. It seemed only yesterday that they had arrived. As I walked back to *Slamat*

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to continue the journey I felt quite alone. Well, no point hanging about!

I prepared *Slamat* for sea. By 2200 I was out of the harbour and back in the Celtic Sea, poled out with light winds. Some dolphins came to say hello and I settled into my first night with a star-filled sky and a wonderful, milky bioluminescence trailing from the rudder. Making course adjustment to avoid a couple of gas rigs and with light conditions overnight I slept well, but covered little ground. Light winds all day backed in late afternoon with the reacher pulling giving 5kts. With variable winds I played with the pole and reacher trying to keep the speed up. There was a stunning sunset, many dolphins about streaming bioluminescence. What an evening!

At 0700 I was at my max south, 49.50N, and gybed to start east again. It was a busy sailing day: reefing, poling out, reacher up, down, reef out,



Swimming at sunset

engine on, off - all quite fickle. I felt I had to make the effort to keep the speed up. I could plan where I needed to be to catch the tide, but I could not afford to be on a headland when the tide turned foul.

By 2230 I was off Salcombe with 55nm to Portland and 85nm to the fairway buoy and the Solent beyond. I woke at 0030 with the sails limp. Engine on again, but by 0230 we

had wind and full sail. At 0530 the AIS alarm woke me. The wind had changed direction and I had been sailing SE for 2 hours. Oh well, a better angle for the lighter conditions?

I made a few calculations. Having made only 20 miles in a whole tide, I was now 25 miles from the Bill and keen to get past in the fair tide. I motor-sailed, making Anvil Point at midday. If I motor-sailed up Christchurch Bay I could be home tonight, 25 July.

I cut into the Bay, sailing and motor-sailing and made good progress, getting to Hurst Narrows at 1630, crossing my tracks after 2,441 miles. Pushing hard to get through the Narrows, I opted for the north shore up the Solent. Following the 5m contour I sailed up to Leap Spit and made the traverse. The wind had increased and I moseyed past Egypt Point feeling great about being back in home waters.

I stowed *Slamat* on the go and at 1915 turned the engine off, secure on my buoy deep in the protection of the Medina.

All was well after a great adventure.