

Name	Edward Robson
Age	Over 21
Boat	Rival 34
Dates	1 July – 12 August 2018
Cruise Area	Navekvarn - Riga - Tallinn - Helsinki - Hanko - Mariehamn - Turku - Navekvarn

Following Racundra and rock-hopping in the Archipelago Sea

Ed Robson - Picaroon

Week 1 - N  vekvarn to Riga (Ed Robson and Jan Jindra)

A career change presented me with decent summer holiday before starting work, and the perfect opportunity to put together some extended time cruising. The weeks before setting off went by in a blur of law conversion course final exams, moving out of a rented flat in London, and re-reading *Picaroon*, my Dad's (Charles Robson, RCC) Rival 34 in N  vekvarn, South of Stockholm. The final preparations included going up the mast twice (thanks to the crews of *Kiloran* and *Tryst*) and generally making sure everything was in working order. I had planned to set off on 2 July, but an early morning call from Lukas, one of my crew for the leg to Riga, to say he had missed his flight, meant our departure was pushed back further. Meanwhile, Jan, the other crew, arrived from Prague via Amsterdam at lunchtime. Lukas had angered the travel gods in some way, and his bus to Stansted for the replacement flight broke down; we took the hint and agreed to go on without him...an inauspicious start to the cruise!

Being in port is not meant to be good for ships or their crew, and I was relieved to be setting out the next morning for Gotland. A strong northerly had just blown through, so we had a long, uneventful passage to Far  sund, switching from full sail to under engine and back as the wind came and went. After a power nap in Far  sund, we had a good passage across from Gotland to the Gulf of Riga, with better sailing and an uneventful crossing of the empty shipping lanes. We finished off the passage by hardening up through the Irbe Strait and blasting NE-wards to Kuressaare and a well-earned rest in the shelter of the town's impressive castle.

9 hours of beauty sleep lent a new perspective to things as we headed out of Kuressaare the next morning. We came out into the Gulf of Riga to the E of Abruksa Island, and hoisted the main and No1 and cracked along at 6-7kts thanks to WNW4. By lunchtime we were approaching Ruhnu, and NW5 was giving us hourly logs of 6.5nms. Jan went below to make lunch, and called up to water coming up through the floorboards in the galley. After a moment of horror, I frantically pressed the bilge pump into action, and emptied the galley sole quickly. Inspecting the bilge, it didn't seem that the water was springing in, so while Jan helmed I finished making lunch (salami and cheese, pickled herring) and then reassessed. More water had crept in over those 15 minutes, and checking forward there was nothing from the impeller or the water tank. With the steps removed, I could see the engine mounting full of water and the its drainage hole blocked. Unblocking this, water poured into the bilge, and then there was a gentle flow from aft of the engine. Lying head first in the pilot berth, I found the problem, the old pipe draining the cockpit had split, and as *Picaroon* rolled, seawater was being pushed up the pipe and out of the split. Closing the cockpit drain seacock stopped the inflow, and we were able to pump the bilge dry, and continue on towards Riga. After this adventure, we kept heading SSE, until the wind came round to NW and we came to the W of the shipping channel into the River Daugava and Riga. An hour or so of experimenting with goose winging, gybe preventers and downwind tacking took us past the freighter anchorage and to the mouth of the river. A week of N'ly wind meant there was

a nice set taking down the river under engine, Jan cooked Count Kinsky's recipe for pasta and pesto, and tugs raced past us. We eventually found a berth in Andrejosta marina, opposite two or three nightclubs, and after quiet beer we turned in, Jan catching an early flight back to Prague the next day. Together we had covered 320nms in four days.

Week 2 – Riga to Tallinn (Ed Robson and Oli Brown)

Despite the nightclubs opposite the marina, Riga was lovely and I spent two days here exploring the old town (delightful) and the food market in the old airship hangers, watching England beat Sweden (encouraging) and various jobs on board Picaroon (satisfying). I was kept company in most of this by London housemate Oli Brown, and his Dad Iain. After provisioning, Oli and I set out for Ruhnu and the Moon Sound on the Monday. On a flat and windless Gulf of Riga, as we motored to Ruhnu, I started what was to become one of the traditions of the cruise – bagpiping as we left a country. My time playing with the Pipes and Drums of the London Scottish Reg't did little to prepare me for holding my balance on the foredeck – a rock and roll power stance is definitely needed! Sadly, this playing did little to encourage the wind on passage to Ruhnu or further North the next day to Koiguste. This still weather meant that our cultural excursion to Ruhnu village, as deserted and surrounded by giant pine trees as Ransome had found it, became a yomp to avoid the swarms of mosquitos.



Ruhnu's old and new church

Though we didn't have the wind, we were given a very warm welcome as foreign yachtsmen in Latvia and Estonia. At Koiguste, HM Niklas gave us a plenty of recommendations for marinas and watering holes on our route through Tallinn and Hanko, and even called his fellow HM at Louanaranna to check that they had a TV and would be watching England's World Cup semi-final that evening. Olaf the HM was similarly welcoming when we arrived and sympathetic when Croatia eventually knocked England out of the World Cup.

Ransome gave the Muhu Sound a reputation as being frickle and tricky, but our sail from Louanaranna to Haapsalu was a joy as we put windless days behind us. Leaving Louanaranna, we rounded Virelaid island, then short-tacked up the E'ly side of Kesse and Kumari Lee, before cutting back to the main channel North, just in time to find the entire fleet of the Muhu Vain regatta coming South under spinnakers on their run to Parnu. After a couple of short tacks we lined up our gap in the fleet and squeezed through and on upwind til we got to the dredged channel at Kuivarahu and then motored to Haapsalu and a slap up dinner when we reached the Grand Holm Marina.

With a crew pick-up in Tallinn looming, we pressed on and, despite being buzzed at low-level by NATO fighter jets, and stopping for some unsuccessful fishing, made it to Tallinn after lunch on Saturday. We were greeted almost immediately by Richie Sheldon and Joe Hicks, crew for the next week, with cold beers and thoughts of exploring the Old Town.

Week 3 Tallinn to Hanko (Ed Robson, Oli Brown, Richie Sheldon, Joe Hicks)

It was either the heat, or that we were feeling a little jaded after our night on the town, but the next morning we decided that leaving Tallinn for an anchorage of our own was preferable. A rendition of Donald Maclean's Farewell to Oban on the pipes brought the Tallinn Harbour Festival to a halt as we headed out towards Prangli, just in the Gulf of Finland, for a cooler and more peaceful night at anchor.

Our arrival in Helsinki the next day was as eventful as our departure from Tallinn... we had enjoyed a good sail across the Gulf of Finland, making Helsinki roads from Prangli in one close-reach, and found our way through the out-lying islands to drop sails just short of Suomenlinna fort. Coming into the main harbour, we made to come round to the E of Blekholmen before entering the NJK marina. As we did, a stout coastguard launch put themselves firmly between us and our destination. Two coastguards gestured with luminous ping-pong bats on the foredeck. As we ran alongside them, they informed us that because of the Trump-Putin summit, entrance into the main harbor, and the NJK marina was banned. After deploying some international diplomacy perhaps lacking elsewhere in Helsinki at that time, they agreed we could approach Blekholmen by the W'ly channel. We, and an NJK-bound Laser dinghy, were then given a police escort practically to the dock. Sammy, the NJK harbourmaster gave us a warm welcome, recognising Picaroon from the RCC rally in 2014. We had our first Finnish sauna, and then headed ashore to negotiate the roadblocks, sightsee and have dinner. Our route back to the NJK ferry was significantly shorter as the roadblock had been lifted.

After a day of being tourists in Helsinki, we then meandered through the archipelago towards Hanko, our progress being punctuated by unsuccessful attempts at fishing and successful log-fired saunas. We poked our nose into Elissaare, where the reedy approach with its charted depth of 1.3m was more interesting and appealing than the actual mooring spot, which was busy and narrow. Instead, we struck out on our own past Barösund, and found what looked like a suitable anchorage, in an inlet on the side of Hattö. Leaving the suggested channel, we skirted rocks lying in between larger islands, and dropped our anchor in 3.5m in a very secluded bay. Our taste for

adventure had paid off. Here we swam in peace, and as we enjoyed an evening Pimms, Richie managed to catch a small perch on a hook and chorizo, much to Joe's chagrin. This became our appetizer (not great eating but satisfying), this was followed by burger and oven chips, and then games of poker and hunt-the-mosquito.



Picaroon alone at anchor in the skärgård

The rest of our cruise to Hanko was a tale of contrasts, a rainy downwind sail to Munkshamn, followed by a warming sauna, and then tacking up to Hanko the next day in brilliant sunshine. We celebrated the end of cruise with a slap up fish supper on the quayside in Hanko, and the crew found relatively good value bottles of rose and Lena, a Finn our age who agreed to give them a lift to Helsinki airport the next day!

Week 4 – Hanko to Mariehamn (Ed Robson, Katie Lockett, Ricky Martin, Charlene Ting, Tom Cooper-Jones)

With new crew and provisions, we left Hanko and enjoyed a gentle sail to Ramskär, with Tom and Katie getting used to helming again, Ricky sleeping on the foredeck and Charlene getting used to the motion of Picaroon. Our pilot book said that an approach to Ramskär from the SE was not advised without good visibility, calm seas and local knowledge. We had two out of the three, and decided the approach could be made. There were nervous moments for the skipper as we tried to distinguish between islands and the marker posts on our blind approach, but eventually the tiniest gap in the rocks appeared and we squeezed to the pool beyond. The only way to relax after that was a long sauna, a bracing swim and a hearty meal, then some beers as the sun went down. For the new crew, it was a hard day to beat!

This crew was the most inexperienced of my cruise, so I was relieved to have light, if shifting winds as we made our way westward towards Mariehamn. This allowed us to explore the skärgård safely and find our own anchorages, and also enjoy a spinnaker run SE-ward to Utö, and then, having provisioned and had lunch, another spinnaker run NE in the afternoon to an anchorage at Österskär/Ramskär.



Charlene Ting and Katie Lockett take us downwind under spinnaker

Our final leg to Mariehamn started under spinnaker, but was then interrupted by a cruise ship bearing down on us as we rounded Björkö. We then had a powerful reach through Rödhamn, and made the final approach to Mariehamn under engine. We were welcomed to Mariehamn by the coastguard, who wanted to come alongside and question us. This turned out to be more for the benefit of their RIB helm, who, by the looks of their attempt to come alongside, was still learning! After we satisfied them of our bona fides, we found a berth on the outside of the E harbour, and discovered we, along with the jeunesse dorée of the Åland Islands, had arrived just in time for Mariehamn Rock Fest! We avoided that, but could hear the music as we played out a highly competitive game of mini-golf until bad light stopped play. Charlene's score in particular was hampered by the black golf-ball she'd been issued with.

Week 5 - Mariehamn to Turku (Ed Robson and Katie Lockett)

Pinned in by a strong E'ly for two days, we made the most of Mariehamn – cleaning and tidying ship and searching for the Pommern, the old windjammer which is part of the Maritime Museum (moved to a new berth while the museum is renovated). We consoled ourselves with a Berlusconi pizza at Kopi, so-named because the Italian politician had famously made critical remarks about Finnish cuisine...their response was to create a pizza with smoked reindeer, chanterelle mushrooms and red onions.

Our first day out of Mariehamn was one of the highlights of the cruise. Katie and I extricated ourselves from our berth quite nicely, and with two reefs in the main and no foresail we made a brisk set of downwind gybes to make it to Kobbå Klintar, the old pilot station for Mariehamn. The harbour here has enough space for a couple of pilot boats, which we only discovered coming round the breakwater, and in the rush to get our stern line set, Picaroon's pullpit took a hefty bump. Despite our inauspicious arrival, Kobbå Klintar was fantastic. The volunteer-staffed cafe served excellent traditional Åland cakes, and even sneakily sold us some fizz to go with our salmon that evening, the old steam-powered foghorn and pilot house were fascinating, and apart from that the whole scene was very peaceful, slightly other-worldly like a Wes Anderson film-set. Our neighbours warned us that when cruise ships come past very close, the water drains out of the harbour, and in the middle of a thunderstorm, the water level plummeted by 0.2 m as they thundered past in the channel close-by. Returning from our swim the next day, we got talking to a couple of volunteers who had arrived. They came every week to make traditional ropes, drink a few beers, and enjoy each other's company. They offered to teach us ropemaking and we both accepted. We sailed away from Kobbå Klintar and round to the northern coast of the Åland Islands with two lovely three-strand wound ropes.



Ropemaking on the dock at Kobbå Klintar

For the next three days we barely saw a soul, apart from when we stopped in Kalunsundet for essential provisions. The north east of the Åland Islands is the road less travelled, and coming towards the end of the season, we found peaceful anchorages at Torpön, Hamnö and the upper pool of Berghamn. We were jolted out of our isolation as we sailing towards our final crew rendez-

vous in Turku. We'd started the day by sailing off the anchor in Berghamn, rowing Picaroon through the narrow entrance (resisting the temptation to motor), and soon joined the fleet of other yachts reaching up towards Turku in a very pleasant westerly, including a Sun Odyssey 50, towing a clinker-built dinghy at some pace! As we neared Turku, the steep-sided coastline gave us patchy gusts so Katie helmed as I played the mainsheet for the last mile or so to the small ship channel. The signs of civilization were all here: more and more elaborate sauna huts, icebreakers, coastguard vessels and the various Scandinavian naval academies assembled for a military exercise. We had just had time to moor in the inner harbour at Turku, and were heading for the showers as Dad/Charles Robson (RCC) glided into view in a Tesla taxi. By the time we'd washed and returned, Picaroon was looking smarter, now flying the blue ensign and the RCC burgee. Having done 71nm in the last 48 hrs, we were tired but had enough energy for a very good dinner and a catch-up at a riverfront restaurant.

Week 6: Turku to Näveklarn (Edward Robson, Katie Lockett and Charles Robson)

With some miles to cover to be back in Näveklarn in around 10 days, we planned and provisioned in Turku, using Fori, the 1904-built free ferry across the River Aura, to get to the supermarket. We struck out on a windless day to Borgarelauto, and then the next day had a very satisfying upwind duel with a Finnish cruiser to Bredskär. We managed to get sails down and moor up before an almighty squall came through. One of the challenges of having planned a cruise in a loop, is soon enough, you are faced with an upwind section, and this was the week. From Bredskär, we faced F4-5 on the nose and this gave Katie ample practice of how to helm to the tell-tales, and through the short Baltic chop, before ending up in Sandö, which we'd previously visited with Tom, Ricky and Charlene that evening.

Rödhamn was our last stop in the Åland Islands before crossing to Sweden, and it was hard not to feel that you were tracing a well-trodden path, as we waited with the scores of other boats to set out the next day. Having ordered fresh buns from the friendly harbourmaster we had steaks and went to bed hoping for a kind wind. Our forecast arrived with the bread rolls at 9, S-SW 3-4, which meant an early departure was better. Others though the same and left as soon as the rolls had been delivered, and we followed, giving the late risers a blast on the bagpipes to signal Picaroon leaving Finland. Passing the S'ly tip of Rödö, we hoisted sails, then did a headsail change as well as lowering the main to reposition the mischievous main halyard shackle. The early S wind meant we made useful ground to windward of our bearing. Once we'd past the last of the skerries off the Åland Islands, the sea quietened and so had Katie's sea-sickness, and the wind rose to S5. This held and we made the crossing to Sweden very nicely. Into the start of the Stockholm archipelago. We bore away as we neared Gränham, which turned out to be considerably smaller than it appeared in our pilot book. We moored bows-to against the steep rock, using a huge iron ring to moor. These strong weathered rings and the rock carvings by crews from as far back as 1755 stood as proof of Gränham's role as a jumping-off point for traders making the passage across to the Åland Islands.



Departing Rödhamn under bagpipes and engine

With time-running out to get to Näveklarn, the next three days passed in a blur: a short windless day to Ingmarsö was followed by two long days of pushing S-SW against strong southerlies and short Baltic chop through the Stockholm Archipelago to Landsort. As we started out on the final leg from Landsort we faced rolling and confused swell. Through the narrows at Stendören, our spirits were lifted as we found out that younger brother Jamie had won gold in the GB Eight at the World Universities Rowing Championships in Shanghai. Wearing wooly hats and eating porridge for breakfast, it definitely felt like the end of the holiday and summer. Passing Oxelösund, we motor-tacked up the inside of the islands towards Näveklarn and dropped the sails when safely inside Näveklarn Viken. The final days of the cruise were frustratingly heavy-going, against the funnelled wind each day, but bring Picaroon alongside back at Näveklarn also brought me an enormous feeling of satisfaction and completion. This was only increased by showers, a slap-up end of cruise meal at the cafe, and a very good bottle of red wine aboard Sage (RYS).

Reflections

Stepping off Picaroon at the end of the next day to catch a flight back to the UK, I felt very grateful to have done this cruise with her – true to the reputation of Rivals, Picaroon had been steady and true throughout, putting up with all my mistreatment of her! But the boat was only part of it, this cruise was only possible with the help and support of so many, and I'd like to thank them here. First and foremost, the generosity of the RCC and the Noel Marshall Award was instrumental in getting me afloat - meeting the costs of charts and pilot guides and those during the trip. I hope this log and the pilotage information collected will go some way to inspiring/encouraging others to explore this fascinating cruising ground. The same level of thanks go to members of the RCC Paul Heiney, for being open to my application, and Oliver Wells, who was generous with his time

and advice when I was in the planning stages of the cruise. To Dad, who taught, and still teaches me, much of what I know about sailing, and agreed to let me use Picaroon for the summer. To Katie, who understood how important this cruise was to me, and went above and beyond to crew with enthusiasm and a good sense of humour for half of it. To my crews from my time at Bristol and Oundle, who were funny and questioning crewmembers, and a joy to have onboard. Special thanks must also go to Jan and Oli who took on a week each as crew at the beginning of the cruise covering the unheralded cruising ground. I received a lot of advice and support from fellow sailors along the way on this cruise, and have tried to mention those who did in this account, but there were many others who came and welcomed me, seeing a British ensign and being curious. Special mention goes to Pauli Laxman, an NJK member who showed a real interest in my cruise and gave me much valuable advice on legs between Helsinki and the Åland Islands. The final word has to go to Arthur Ransome, whose Swallows and Amazons inspired me as a child, and who, in Racundra, did much of my cruise unaided by technology when this cruising ground was even less explored than it is today: Grab a chance and you won't be sorry for a might-have-been!