

Royal Cruising Club Cadet Cruise 2018
By Robbie Tidbury

The journey to Baltimore was smooth and easy largely due to the meticulous organisation of our Captain, Izzie Harrison-Hall. On arrival, we were treated like royalty by Mary and Con (owners of the Baltimore Yacht Charter), who gave us home-made scones and jam, tea, coffee, and of course our three boats - Inishceim, Inishleigh, and Inishbeg. After a hefty provisioning operation - we settled into the boats for the first night.

We were up at sunrise, and left Baltimore Harbour through the sound north of Sherkin Island - a nice start to the cruise! With the RCC Sunflower due to blossom on the Tuesday in Glengariff, we thought it best to catch the fair tide all the way round Mizzen Head into Bantry Bay on day one, leaving us ample time to do some weeding before planting the seed. All three boats enjoyed a reach followed by a beat in 15-20kts of wind, so at least if it was light for the rest of the week we'd already ticked the 'do some sailing' box. We found a peaceful anchorage just north of Bere Island and headed into Castletown-Bearhaven for some provisions and an ice cream. After dinner on the boats, our Skipper and chief gardener Will Whatley briefed us further on the Sunflower, although I think the crew took on more liquid than information.

Our mission for Monday was to end up in Glengariff, which wasn't far, so a long lunch in Adrigole was the order of the day. After a gentle sail there, we rafted up and ate. The bay itself was stunning, with an almost 360 degree view of the colossal hills. Whilst I'd like to say that we had lengthy discussions about charts and bearings, what we actually learned over lunch was that neither a grappling hook nor a saucepan lid are useful when retrieving a bucket from the sea-bed. The sail up to Glengariff was slightly more entertaining, with some unspoken-of non-competitive racing bringing out plenty of competition amongst the fleet. Reefs were going in and out left, right and centre amid shouts of 'starboard' and 'windward boat' before we all arrived at the anchorage and declared that we hadn't even noticed the other boats were nearby. Atmosphere was tense that night as we all knew what was coming the next day.

When sunflower rafts come up in conversation (as they do at any good dinner party) someone often says something along the lines of 'oh they can't be that hard - they do them all the time in Mediterranean flotillas!'. In fact, this was even said a couple of times by cadets in the build up to that Tuesday. On further consideration, however, it was decided that some of the members' rather more classic and beautiful yachts probably wouldn't be so obedient astern, and they certainly wouldn't be as willing to risk a paint-job. Complacency was swept firmly aside, and laminated diagrams, spreadsheets and instructions were handed out like confetti. Former Cadet Secretary, Bobby Lawes, sensibly picked the calmest and sunniest day of the week to form the raft, and so we were treated to scorching sun and glassy waters for the day. This enabled a relatively smooth and efficient operation, with the only casualties I think coming from the cadets - Jasper Ross (who spent so long manning the BBQ that his right hand was medium-rare by the end of the day), and Hugh Wilson, who, as it was his birthday, spent the day visiting members and accumulating beverages (his injury came the following morning). The circle numbered 30+ boats, and was closed by our commodore, Henry Clay, effortlessly slotting Flycatcher into the ring under sail. The BBQ itself was an impressive feature - it hung from the davits off the back off Huahine in place of the tender! This, combined with the fact it was possible to walk the whole way round the sunflower without getting wet, made Huahine somewhat of a hub for the afternoon. The raft saw a lot of variety, both in terms of boats and people. It was organised and assembled largely by the cadets, who numbered 16, although the job was not so onerous due to the experience, skill and cooperation of the members!

Credit must be given mainly to Bobby and Will, however, who together had been planning the event for months on end, discussing intricate details and preparing for every eventuality via various phone calls, meetings, emails and Skype calls.

Unfortunately the RCC songbook couldn't make an appearance due to worsening conditions resulting in the decision to disembark the raft before dark. This was a somewhat less meticulous process than the forming of the raft. One gust was so great, in fact, that it seemed to blow all the petals off the flower at once. I expect the petals had rather more Dutch courage by this point in the afternoon.

The cadets were in good spirits the next morning, and proceeded to sail out of Glengariff, heading across the bay into Bantry Marina. It was then that we realised how clever Bobby had been when he chose the Tuesday -

he must have known we would see 20+ knots of wind on the Wednesday, building to 40kts overnight. The sail was brief but sufficient, and we strapped ourselves in tight behind the marina walls. There were 18 RCC members there with us, including vice-commodore Nick Chavasse and Bobby. It was only right, therefore, for us all to pile on to Huahine and drown out the whirring wind with a raucous RCC sing-song. The choir performed excellently, led skillfully by Adam Bridger on the guitar. We must have sung each one twice before calling it a night.

The weather hadn't improved much by morning. Although sheltered in Bantry Marina, the swell once we were out in the bay was keen to be noticed. We approached it head on, and a long beat ensued, with gusts over 30kts forcing multiple reefs. Our target was Crookhaven, which was one of the few truly sheltered places we could spend the night. It was quite a few hours - and long hours at that - before Mizzen Head was abeam. Here we saw the Atlantic flex its muscles, sending us swell so big that in the troughs you wouldn't have been able to see the mast of a boat over the next crest. While I'm sure this would be just a ripple for members, it was certainly an exhilarating day for the cadets! If we ticked the 'done some sailing' box on day one, then we ticked off a few others rounding Mizzen Head. Light was fading by the time we found a mooring buoy, and we were thankfully, as the swell was still coming from the South-West, completely sheltered for the night.

The Friday morning began by celebrating Will's birthday. We gathered for breakfast, and discussed plans for the day. The final destination was Baltimore. It was quickly decided that it would be a shame to come so close to the Fastnet rock and not race round it, and so the RCC Fastnet Race was born. The rules were simple - at 9am a horn would mark the start. Engines were off limits, and so we were to sail off the buoys, which was made all the more entertaining by the fact that it was a downwind start and turning space amongst the mooring buoys was hard to come by. After a remarkably smooth start, however, Inishceim, Inishleigh and Inishbeg were reaching for the Fastnet rock. With a reach followed by a run on the agenda, there was little room for tactics, and boat speed on a charter boat is often a guessing game (says the Skipper of the slowest boat). Inishceim were last to reach the rock, and so the only option was to take a tighter line than the leading boats. Having snapped some close-up pictures of the lighthouse, Inishceim were back abeam of Inishleigh (Inishbeg had an unassailable lead by this point). It was a dead run, and so a vast array of techniques were used, including makeshift jib poles, hybrid asymmetrics, barbers, and there were rumours of water tanks being emptied to help with trim.

Inishleigh crossed the finish line (the south entrance to Baltimore Harbour) no more than a minute before Inishceim. The result was soon forgotten, however, and we rafted up for lunch.

Dinner out in Baltimore followed by some birthday celebrations lead to a very jolly last night of the cruise. The week was deemed to be such a great success by all that reunions were quickly organised and numbers exchanged. I'm sure we'll see even more cadets signing up for next year's cruise!

It is with great sadness, however, that we bid farewell (in the Cadets) to our Skipper, Will, who has just launched his two new boats: Henry a Van de Stadt Samoa 47 which he has been building for 3 years, and Sir David Attenborough, which has probably been in the pipeline for a bit longer. I'm sure Will's influence on the Cadet cruises will only become fully apparent when we see how many people it takes to try and fill his enormous shoes in the future! We wish him all the best as a full member on board his new boats.

It is also nearing the end of Izzie's time as Cadet Captain. Izzie has led a hugely positive transformation of RCC cadets, and has worked hard to create an active group of keen sailors who are all good friends.

As you already know, Bobby has now passed over the reins to Miles as Hon Cadet Secretary, but we should recognise the huge contribution that Bobby has made to the RCC Cadets. Thank you Bobby!