

Title: RCC Pilotage Foundation ATLANTIC FRANCE – Ouessant to the Spanish Border. Second Edition

Author: Nick Chavasse

British-based cruising yachtsmen can find interesting areas to visit on all sides of the country. Some like the grand beauty and challenge of Scotland, some love the calm waterways of the Netherlands and others choose the soft loveliness of Ireland. The yachtspeople that go south to France are often driven by the prospect of good weather as well as good food and those who manage to round the Ushant peninsula in the summer months and get past Penmarc'h are almost always rewarded by settled sunny weather and light winds. The north Biscay area is a tremendously attractive cruising ground though it does get very busy from mid-July to the end of August. However, as a combination of islands, pleasant harbours, deep and pretty rivers and good anchorages, the Atlantic coastline of France is hard to beat.

There are a number of pilotage books to choose from when going south of Ushant but the great strength of the RCC Pilotage Foundation *Atlantic France* is its progressive development from previous editions, which means that it has become better and better over the years. The very first was written by Adlard Coles in 1959 under the title *Biscay Harbours and Anchorages* in two volumes covering from L'Aber Wrac'h to Bordeaux. In those days pilotage books were rare publications and this first edition must have been a tremendous effort to get together.

We British avidly read Adlard's mouth-watering descriptions of the coastal features in both editions of *Biscay Harbours and Anchorages*, as did the French, so delightful inlets that Adlard had discovered such as Stêr-Wen in Belle Isle soon became very popular. The book was then revised by Professor Black, and others under the title *North Biscay*. In 2010, because the coverage was extended all the way to the Spanish border, the book was renamed *Atlantic France* and was up-dated by Jeremy Parkinson. Now comes the second edition by Nick Chavasse who has done a thorough job revisiting the wonderfully appealing harbours and anchorages. The photographs, especially the aerial ones, give a really good flavour of the charming little ports and rivers.

Anyone who has the time and energy to revise a pilot book for this particularly well-loved cruising area is taking the risk of attracting criticism for getting some minor point slightly wrong but there are no errors apparent to me. On the other hand one might question the chart of the daunting Portsall inner passages where the two potential tracks dive into the gutter, ie the gap between facing pages, just at the most tricky points ... Also the fact that the gloriously beautiful stretch of the Blavet river has no chartlet, nor mentions the *relais* Hotel de Locguénolé landing, which can lead to a memorable breakfast, lunch or dinner in most utterly lovely surroundings.

There are people who had to wait years before managing to get up the gorgeous Aulne River to Chateaulin and, to continue with some select remarks, Nick takes us up confidently and with good attention to detail. He has also been up the Loire to Nantes and manages to be more helpful than some other publications that might be expected to shed some accurate light on where to berth. Again he provides good attention to detail. Later he says that it would be *criminal* to sail past St Martin, Île de Ré: strong words but, for all its extremely crowded *bassin à flot*, he is quite right. It is a superb stop. At La Rochelle he justifiably exhorts his reader to go past the vast marina and enjoy the sights and sounds of the old port of this fabulous city. I remember being there on a mid-summer's eve with the city jam-packed with visitors for a brilliant music festival with bands every 100m. Everyone in this vast happy crowd was perfectly behaved and there was not one policeman in sight.

When he gets to the fascinating Île d'Aix, Nick could perhaps give a word of caution to say that the moorings are dreadfully exposed if it comes on to blow from the west, even though the swell doesn't get in. He sings the praises of the Charente River and gives a well-balanced description of the town of Rochefort, fourteen miles up, a most elegant and unusual town. Moreover he works in the replica frigate *Hermione*, built and based at Rochefort, and the good value the place is to keep a yacht over winter.

All told Nick Chavasse has done a very good job and this pilotage book *Atlantic France* has indeed become better and better since Adlard Coles started it off. It is thoroughly comprehensive and gives those with it a huge advantage over those without.

Peter Bruce RCC, May 2018

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