

## The West Country Cruise

The sky, in July, was full of mares' tails and mackerel, and as any old sea dog will tell you, this does not bode well for the settled weather required for a cruise to the Isles of Scilly. And so it was, wet and windy to start our summer cruise and wet and windy to end.

Between July 4 and July 11, strong south-westerly winds caused very rough conditions, particularly to the west of the Hurst narrows on the ebb tide. This resulted in the ports of Lymington and Yarmouth becoming increasingly popular as crews gathered, waiting for an opportunity to break out of the Western Solent.

One by one, six of our West Country Cruisers assembled in Lymington. **Arabesque** arrived first, soon joined by **Lady E**, **Trivial Pursuit**, **Wind Gypsy**, then the **Firecrest** crew and **Aquaholic**, who was on her way back from the Helford River after a very blustery two week holiday. Our enforced stay in Lymington gave some a chance to use their newly acquired national bus passes to explore as far as Hengisbury Head and Bournemouth, some to swim in Lymington's vast sea water pool, while others chose the extra windy, rainy days for a swift visit home to sort out their e-mails and post. Despite this frustrating delay, bon homme and hospitality abounded and we had many a gathering to which we welcomed Jeff and Rosalinde from The Royal Cornwall Y.C. (Falmouth) who happened to be going our way with **Asteria** their two week old Nordship 40.

Saturday July 12 At last a break in the weather! The early morning saw a grand armada streaming West on the first of the ebb from both

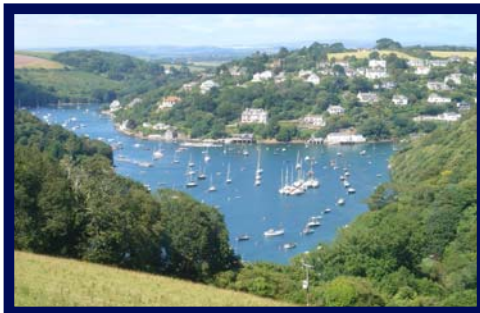


the Lymington River and Yarmouth. Over a hundred vessels sighted, nose to tail, all anxious to get away having been delayed from their summer pilgrimage to far away places. The sea was not yet calm by any means, but four of our fleet reached Weymouth while others put in to Studland Bay and Poole. By Sunday, many had reached the River Dart and **Mistress**, who had been in the West Country for the Blind Week event, was already at Darthaven and able to arrange for us to eat together at the Ship Inn, Kingswear, whose owner opened the restaurant that evening especially for the thirteen of us. This was a fine evening in every respect and enjoyed by all.

The weather had, by now, become calm, warm and sunny and by the July 15 we were moored to a visitor's pontoon in the picturesque River Yealm where we were welcomed most heartily by the Yealm Yacht Club. The next day was to be a "Training Day" (Ed. A day off) so that

those with maintenance or shopping to do, could go about their business at leisure.

Communications between our fellow travellers has been by text messaging, but sadly Vodafone appear not to be able to provide a signal in the Yealm valley. The team leader was therefore required to climb nearly as far as Dartmoor before his very sophisticated mobile telephone would operate to send current news



to participating vessels in the form of a "group" dispatch. At last a couple of signal bars appeared on the phone, so eight recipients were selected and the send button depressed. The confounded apparatus sent to three of the numbers, then the signal failed again. As there was no knowing which of our cruisers had been contacted, there was nothing for it but to climb another half mile towards the edge of Dartmoor and start again. A well earned pint was enjoyed at The Dolphin Inn on return to Newton Ferrers.

Thursday July 17. It was decided to BBQ aboard **Arabesque** this evening and although **Firecrest**, **Trivial Pursuit** and **Wind Gypsy** were already heading back home, the crews of **Lady E**, **Lorella Jo**, and **Mistress** arrived for drinks about 1800hrs. The BBQ simmered over the pontoon. We were all gently soaking ourselves in the evening sun and liquid refreshment, when one of our number spotted two long lost friends passing by in a rubber dinghy. In his enthusiasm to attract their attention, he missed his footing and fell headlong onto the pontoon, his specs coming into contact with an adjacent cleat. No sooner had we recovered from this drama when these newly found friends came aboard, brushing as they did so, against the BBQ which immediately turned through 180 degrees, depositing two joints of lamb and several potatoes and other vegetables onto the pontoon. Fortunately, and although this provided good entertainment for other nearby crews, only one potato was lost to the river. The evening continued without further incident and the casualty was soon revived with another glass of wine.

Fowey was to be our next port of call, as from here The Lost Garden of Heligan is an attraction not to be missed. **Arabesque**, **Lady E** and **Asteria** moored together on the Pont Pill pontoon which both **Aquaholic** and **Avalon** had found untenable only the week before. Owing to the height of the waves being driven into the port, **Aquaholic** had moved to take shelter in the Helford River and **Avalon** sailed to Mylor on the River Fal, from where her crew traveled to Penzance to catch the helicopter service to the Isles of Scilly. This should not be counted as a port of call!

But for now, we found that the most efficient route to The Lost Gardens was by fast ferry from Fowey to Mevagissey, then to bus the remaining couple of miles to the Gardens' entrance; total journey time 45 minutes, cost, a very reasonable £10 per person return! Although the day of our visit was damp with strong winds, The North Garden and The Jungle were spectacular and we all agreed that this was a day well spent ashore.

Sunday July 20. Up at 0500 to quieter conditions, so we decided on an early start to Falmouth. **Asteria** has her permanent berth in Port Pendennis Marina where both **Lady E** and **Arabesque** also found accommodation. Both motor boats required fuel and we were shocked to find that the bunkering barge was no longer supplying private vessels and the nearest alternative, Falmouth Marina, was charging 99p per litre. We bought no more than was absolutely necessary! That evening **Asteria**, **Lady E** and **Arabesque** were able to dine in the "oak room" at the Royal Cornwall Y.C. The steward and staff made us very comfortable. We presented our compliments to the Commodore and Members.

**Lady E** is still determined to try for The Isles of Scilly. **Arabesque**, taking a more jaundiced view of the mares' tails, decided to stay locally and explore the Rivers Fal and Helford.

**Asteria** was keen to give her new rig a test in the brisk wind and invited the crew of **Arabesque** to join in for a day to Helford and return.

On July 21 **Lady E** was congratulated on her reported safe arrival in St Mary's, she being the only one of our fleet to reach the Scilly Isles. **Asteria** set off for Brittany and **Arabesque** visited St Mawes and St. Just.

July 22. Having a day alone, **Arabesque** explored the River Fal to Malpas and by bus to Truro. That evening Maggie (from the office) and Mick Puleston were seen cruising up the River Fal in their motor boat **Sea Spy**.

Wednesday July 23. Delighted to welcome **Trombone**, who had sailed from the Morbihan to join the rally. By this time, **Lorella Jo** and **Arabesque** had arranged to meet at St Mawes, so the crews of the three vessels gathered for supper together on **Arabesque**. Everyone had a story to tell and we enjoyed a very convivial evening. **Lady E** is still at the Isles of Scilly and no doubt she too has a story to tell!

The next day, "oilys" were needed to dinghy ashore to St Mawes in a very brisk easterly wind. From St Anthony's Head, Maggie on **Sea Spy** was sighted again, this time heading for the River Helford. The conditions appear very rough.

So now it is time for us all to plan our homeward voyages. But not before another excellent evening together at St Mawes aboard **Lorella Jo** followed by another happy visit to the Yealm Yacht Club at Newton Ferrers.

On Saturday July 26 we wished each other bon voyage as we took our separate ways. **Lady E** has now been in the Scillies best part of a week but intends to start for home today and to overnight at Newlyn.

And so it was that the West Country Cruise drew to an end. Looking back on the month perhaps the weather wasn't that bad! Of course memories mellow with time but I can't wait to put to sea again. Boats need to be lived on! Happily everyone is safely home.

Bob Stevenson (*Arabesque*)



## Summer and Park Proms at Osborne House

It's been a funny old summer so far; at the beginning I got run down by a rowing boat propelled by a well known broadcaster. Fortunately it all happened very slowly, as these things tend to do. Once a collision was inevitable I stopped **Genista**, but our man came straight on bows to bows and BANG, there he was, in some disarray. I made a helpful remark about keeping a sharp look out, so he took out his earphones and said "What?". Apparently the "Today" programme blots out the noise of a pair of large diesels. Mercifully, rubber dinghies don't hurt that much.

And then there was the weather; those who threatened to venture far and wide, by and large, didn't get there. Henrik tells me that Denmark was the best place, he having fine weather throughout our monsoon.



So, on to the Proms in the Park. Foul morning Saturday, when we set out for Island Harbour, blowing northwest 5/6. Solent, choppy with salt spray. Better up the Medina but the wind was still with us. Freeflow through Island harbour lock, berth half left ahead. Not good. Slowing to turn into the berth the wind caught the stern and blew us on to the stem of the neighbouring boat. It was an old boat with a beak that slid under our rails; no damage to us but the rails on the beak got slightly bent. Not an auspicious start. Disentangled and safely

... tied up, we repaired to **Jono** for pre-lunch drinks. Half the party were with us but the rest tied up in East Cowes. Thus the coach taking us to the concert needed to divert to pick up the complete party. Eventually 49 souls arrived at Osborne with all the paraphernalia needed for on such occasions. Lance raised the large Club burgee and the cruising in company flag on the end of a long fishing rod to define our pitch. Then a miracle occurred. The sun came out and furthermore, it stayed with us until it set. Gradually the wind died and a fabulous evening greeted the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. They did their stuff in some style and the large audience sang and waved their flags. Despite heavy weather gear after the sun went down, we knew what William Blake meant by "England's green and pleasant land".

The fireworks were better than ever; how do they manage to synchronise them with the music or was that my imagination.

Next day we were joined by **Rise 'n Shine too** for lunch at the Island Harbour bistro and then another minor miracle; a fine day and the Hythe contingent had freeflow at both ends!

Roy Stoner (**Genista**)

## St. Vaast Blockade!!

Blockade! Just mention the word, even in a whisper, and you send sailors running for their halyards and jib sheets. Not so the RSYC members who on the rally to St. Vaast in May, reached for the restaurant guides, tour guides and wine lists !!

This Year proved to be a rally of adventure, haut cuisine and great opportunities to visit the best epicier in the Cherbourg Peninsular, owned and run by M Gossellin and his family.

Lead, as always, by that "Anglais" Rex Woodgate, a total of 5 boats and 17 souls arrived at St. Vaast Harbour amid a large fleet of fishing boats, many carrying banners protesting against the high price of diesel - an issue we all sympathise with, not least those who put to sea in conditions many of us would not venture out in!



Notwithstanding this, the rope tied across the harbour entrance, like a great cheese cutter, was ceremoniously lowered and raised again, allowing boats to enter but not leave, which turned the weekend rally into a festive holiday.

Consequently Rex, or 'Monsieur Rex' as he became known by the locals, produced a battle-plan. First we would dine at the Fuchsias and Le Debarcadere, savour local delicacies and drink copious quantities of fabulous French wine - sounds familiar. Then a trip of the intriguing Tatihou Island, just off the mainland and reached by an extraordinary four wheeled boat which either motored or sailed back and forth according to the state of the tide, and allowed passengers time to visit the gardens, maritime museum and arsenal.

Next on the battle-plan was a Chicken, Lamb and Oyster lunch Hosted by Rex and Richard on **Rise 'n Shine too** plus a wine tasting at M. Gossellin's, given by his great friend and ally Bertrand.

The finale, a drinks reception and gourmet dinner at Le Panoramique, from where on a

good day, without mist and fog, we were told, one could see for miles from beyond the Barfleur Light to the East of Pointe de Hoc! Long will be remembered the desert chosen by everyone, a crepe of apple and cream 'flambe au Calvados' Ah oui!!

Amid all this a 'breakout' was attempted, and even expected, and failed. A youngish Anglais from Portsmouth with more testosterone than half-dozen fishermen, tried to cut the rope at the harbour entrance. Thus a 50ton trawler was brought to the battle-front like a WWII tank to block the entrance and drive back the lone yacht, which by the end of the skirmish had substantial damage to its bow and forestay.

Eventually the French Government intervened and offered to increase the subsidy given to the fishermen by 100 million Euros over 3 years. They wanted 2 years but, it was enough to allow Rex and his happy band of sailors- very happy- a dignified departure.

Merci St. Vaast!

Richard Ashford

