

Bay of Seine Cruise - Part 1

Richard Gunn

In a fit of madness, I agreed to organise this cruise for those who, either did not want to go all the way to the Netherlands, or who could not take three weeks holiday. The plan was to cross to Fécamp and then proceed via Le Havre, Honfleur, Deauville, Dives and Arromanches, to St. Vaast; the weather had other ideas!

We intended to depart early on Saturday 26th July but the forecast on Friday was not good and, at a long meeting on the Friday evening, we sort of agreed to go to Cherbourg instead. On Saturday morning, after checking forecasts and ringing around, we agreed to go to St. Vaast early on Sunday 27th and I offered to totally reverse the plan, which I did on Saturday afternoon. The plan was now to go to St. Vaast, Grandcamp Maisy, Carentan, Arromanches, Dives, Deauville, Honfleur and probably departing from Le Havre.

On Saturday evening, four boats set off for down harbour moorings; these were Celtic Lady, Gair 'n Mara, Tuli and Kathy and me in Atropos. At about 23:30, the wind suddenly increased and, half asleep, I wondered what was going on. By 03:00 when we woke up, the wind has eased off but there was still about a Force 4 Westerly blowing and we were able to sail for most of the crossing.

The crossing was fairly quick but also very uncomfortable with gusts of 20 knots from the Southwest over a Westerly 15 knots and a lot of swell coming in from the west. Kathy and I made it South of the Isle of Wight before succumbing to seasickness but decided to carry on anyway, as I could not face sailing all the way back again. Sadly, Terry and Alison in Tuli had to turn back due to Alison's feeling ill, so we were now down to three boats.

We eventually made it to St. Vaast, spotting a dolphin on the final approach, and were assisted in to the pontoon by some very kind Englishmen who realised that we were pretty exhausted and took our lines, pretty much manhandling the boat into the pontoon. We met up with Jim Hair and the crew from Endymion but they were going straight back from St. Vaast, so it was a brief meeting. Monday was spent in general exploration (Bob and Sandra got very keen and cycled to Barfleur) and on Tuesday we had a group expedition to the Isle of Tatihou. Later on Tuesday, Kathy and I caught a bus to Cherbourg to meet our daughter Josie from the ferry; halfway there it started raining heavily and carried on all evening (but this was the only rain we had for the whole trip). We had to return by taxi, as there were no more buses that day, and had an interesting conversation with the driver, who spoke virtually no English; even so, we managed to convey to him that we had come over by boat.

We were due to leave for Grandcamp Maisy on Wednesday but again the weather forecast was not good and so we ended up staying until Thursday. Thursday was a much nicer day (quite hot, in fact, as it was for the rest of the cruise) and we set off for Grandcamp Maisy. Just as we were leaving, Julian called me up on the radio from Magistral; it turned out that they were approaching St. Vaast; we agreed to meet up in Carentan on Friday. Just outside St. Vaast I noticed a warning light flashing and discovered that my alternator was trying to deliver about 18 volts to my batteries. We quickly got the sails up and stopped the engine while I removed the alternator belt; it turned out that the regulator had died, so we had to rely on shore charging for the rest of the trip.

On the way to Grandcamp, we spotted a pair of dolphins, which broke the surface several times after one had passed right by our boat. Grandcamp itself was much nicer than

I remember and the marina staff were very helpful and welcoming. Kathy, Josie and I explored the American Rangers museum, which has a very good account of the WW2 battle for the nearby Point du Hoc. In the evening we all went to an excellent restaurant that was I think called Les Grandes Mariniers; great food and an excellent waiter who did conjuring tricks and told jokes (in French, unfortunately).

On Friday the weather was good again and we set off for Carentan. A very pleasant trip up the canal, except for an engine overheating

warning for us just before the lock; I eased the throttle and it went away so we carried on. At Carentan I could find nothing obvious to cause the overheating and we were getting plenty of

water through the exhaust. We met up with Julian and Tessa on Magistral and managed to have two group barbecues on the two nights we were there (no fancy dress though, I am pleased to say). We also went to a free outdoor concert by the French equivalent of the Fishermen's Friends.

On Sunday, the three original boats decided to press on east, while Magistral stayed on in Carentan. We had a very slow trip to Arromanches; we could not lock out of Carentan until 11:00 and then had to fight the tide with a light wind, eventually motoring into the Mulberry Harbour and dropping anchor at about 21:40 in the last of the daylight. On the way, we had had two more engine overheating warnings, the first after 2 hours of motoring and the second 2 hours after that; both times they went away after easing the throttle, which seemed a bit odd.

The night at Arromanches can best be compared to an insane fairground ride and is not to be recommended. There was a lot of swell coming from the north and, although it did ease when the tide turned at about 03:00, none of us slept very much. The next morning (Monday) we set off for Dives, just outside the Mulberry Harbour we got another overheating warning but we were able to sail all the way to Dives as, for once, the wind and tide were in our favour. We sailed as close in to Dives as we could and then motored the rest, just making berth as we got yet another overheating

warning. In the meantime, as we were making for a visitors berth on the starboard side, a French yacht overtook us on the port side and turned, straight across our bows, into the space which his friend had apparently been 'saving' for him; I

had to use full reverse to avoid T-boning his boat - wonderfull! We managed to find another berth on the port side anyway.

Part II in the next edition of Ebb and Flow

