

ALDEBARAN

Sailing Circumnavigation

2nd Report

Padstow, Cornwall to La Coruna, Spain

From England's South Coast we crossed the English Channel to France and thence the infamous Bay of Biscay to Northern Spain. There were good and bad times on this leg of our adventure as described below.

Radio power:

While in Padstow we were visited by David Reed who lives nearby. David heard our radio interview with Tom McSweeney on his weekly marine programme Sea Scapes prior to us leaving Ireland. During the interview we mentioned our plans to call to Padstow and David had been looking out for us. We invited him aboard and gave him a conducted tour of our new home, ALDEBARAN, so Tom your excellent programme is heard far and wide.

Farewell Decko:

Olivia's brother Brian Sweeney, who lives in Southampton, joined us for the sail round to Plymouth and on Wednesday 28th July at 0600 hrs. we departed our popular Cornish village of Padstow on route for Penzance on Cornwall's south coast. Having obtained a new supply of pigeon food from a local pigeon fancier, that I located by centring under his flock, for our racing pigeon passenger of 3 days, "DECKO", that's what we called him, missed our early departure. So ended a nice little story, which began on Sunday last.

0710 hrs saw us marvelling at a basking shark off Trevoise Head, estimated by another boat to be about 36ft.. About an hour later we saw a second shark. The remainder of the passage was uneventful with the exception of rough seas off Land's End inside the infamous Long Ships rocks. Arriving outside Penzance Harbour at 1550 hrs. we motored around for about an hour waiting for the tidal gate to open. It's opening hours are High Water +/- 2 hours.

Friday 30th July saw us up at 0500hrs in preparation for exiting Penzance Harbour as soon as the tidal gate opened at 0600 hrs. Our next port of call was Fowey 50 mile eastwards. It was a beautiful sail in light winds and beautiful sunshine. Arriving in Fowey we tied up to one of the pontoons in the river, costing £12.50stg. per night. We had been in Fowey two years earlier in our previous boat "White Mouse", a 35ft. Trident Voyager. Our plans were to be in Plymouth on Sunday night in preparation for having the water maker fitted and new covers to enclose our cockpit made during the following week.

The Yealm River:

As we were about to leave Fowey on Saturday morning, a neighbouring yachtsman suggested we go up the Yealm river just east of Plymouth for the night. At 1145 hrs, note the late start, we departed Fowey, set full main, full headsail and staysail and had a magic 5 hour sail to the Yealm. With rocks and shallows at the entrance it is essential to follow the sailing directions precisely. We rafted with two other boats to a large visitors mooring buoy. After blowing up our new dinghy for the first time and fitting our new 5HP Yamaha outboard we went ashore and walked to the Yealm Yacht Club, where we had a lovely meal, it was Regatta day.

Plymouth:

At 0915 the following morning we cast off and very slowly made our way out of the river and crossed Plymouth Sound to Cawsand. Anchoring for about four hours, we went ashore and had a walk round the village followed by some refreshments!!!! After which we proceeded to the Mayflower Marina in Plymouth. The Marina is about four miles from the centre of the city, but they run a courtesy bus twice per day to the city centre or you can walk for about ten minutes and catch a city bus. The showering facilities are by far the nicest we have ever come across. Each individual shower room has en suite facilities. It cost us £116 stg. for a weeks stay. As arranged the two companies engaged to undertake the two jobs arrived on Monday afternoon and each began their work. On Tuesday, Olivia's brother Brian returned home to Southampton. During our stay in Mayflower we met Chambery Good from Cork and his friend Maureen on their lovely motor boat "Galene of Cork" They were most hospitable to us during our stay. While walking round the Sutton Harbour Marina in Plymouth one day I met with Tony & Rita Breen, also from Howth Yacht Club, in their Salar 40 "Surprise" and partook in some much appreciated liquid refreshments with them.

As this was a very expensive week for us, with buying extra items for the boat, provisions etc. we were looking forward to getting away. The water maker was completed on Thursday producing 40litres (9 gals.) on one pump or 67 litres (15 gals.) on two pumps. Also on Thursday I went racing with John and Nina Lillie of the Saltash Yacht Club on their J30 "Judious" formally owned by the late Jock Smith of Howth and Malahide. For the record we won. They treated us to a meal in the club, which was much appreciated. Nina as the first lady commodore in the clubs 101 years signed us in as her guests, "real posh". Saturday afternoon saw the cockpit covers completed and also the arrival of Jim & Rita Stanley who were in Cornwall for the forthcoming eclipse of the sun. Sunday, our last full day in Plymouth was the most relaxing, we cruised up the Tamar River past the naval dockyard, past Saltash, under the Brunell Railway Bridge to Cargreen where we anchored and had lunch aboard before returning to the Marina from where Jim & Rita left us.

The English Channel:

At 1650 hrs on Monday 9th August we left Plymouth, escorted through the harbour by Cham and Maureen in "Galene of Cork". Our destination was L'aberwrach in Brittany a distance of 110 miles. For those not familiar with sailing and reading these reports, all sea distances are expressed in nautical miles which are approx. 1852 metres or 1.15 land miles. For the first 4 hours we had no wind and so motored, we then set a reefed mainsail and headsail with the wind increasing to F5/6, (17 to 27 knots) from the northwest. It was **a most unpleasant and very dark night** with a confused. Not a star nor shaft of moonlight was seen and to crown it all **I got seasick**. On reflection I believe that my seasickness was the result of, in addition to the uncomfortable conditions, having been uptight during the last few days.

At 1200 hrs the following day, **with great difficulty** we found the well protected, by rocks, entrance to L'aberwrach and eventually picked up a visitors mooring. No sooner had we tied on when we were called on the radio by David Johnston and Daragh Connolly in the Irish boat "Maud" a Warrior 35. We had met them earlier in Plymouth They were on a buoy astern of us.

France:

After a good night's sleep we went ashore and walked about 45 minutes to the nearest Bank in Landeda for francs. On the return journey we watched a very disappointing eclipse of the Sun. We had 100% cloud cover and the only noticeable difference was a general darkening for about 30 minutes. Glad we did not stay in Plymouth for it as they also had a lot of cloud cover. From reports, we would have been better in Dublin's Phoenix's Park where we believe they had a good view of the event.

Next morning Thursday 12th August, the alarm clock having failed to go off, I actually set it for pm instead of am, we left at 0750 hrs. for Camaret 35 miles to the west, arriving at 1350 hrs. This is a very popular calling port in Brittany for boats from all parts. Visiting boats use the marina pontoon in the outer harbour while the inner is reserved for local pleasure and fishing boats. The perimeter of the inner harbour is littered with wrecks of wooden boats of bygone days and are much photographed. We had planned to continue cruising to South Brittany as far as Belle Ile but with a reasonable three day forecast we decided to attempt crossing the infamous Bay of Biscay.

D-day FRIDAY 13th at 1010 hrs. we departed Camaret for La Coruna in Northern Spain across 350 miles of the Bay of Biscay which has had more horror stories written about it than any other section of any Ocean. Just prior to casting off a lady gave us a bag of goodies including sweets and lots of packets of biscuits, they were leaving the boat after a charter holiday. To this day I wonder how they decided that we, above all the other boats in the marina should be the recipients of this food parcel. Was it our bedraggled appearance ????

Prior to clearing the French coast we had to go through the just as infamous Raz de Sein which can produce tidal streams up to 6.5 knots and is strewn with reefs and rocks on either side. Having taken Dover tide times instead of Brest times we, I mean I, got it wrong. I think we passed Point des Chats about four times during the two hours it took us to cover four miles and exit the Raz. Had I got the tide right we would have been through in about 20 minutes.

Not a good omen for what lay ahead. At 1700 hrs from Radio 4 we got a forecast of south westerly winds of force 4 or 5 occasionally 6 in Biscay and Finisterre, our route. The course for La Coruna was 215 degrees which at the beginning we were able to maintain. After a few hours the seas became very lumpy and most unpleasant. Prior to dusk at 2130 we put two reefs in the mainsail and headsail in preparation for what we expected would be a long uncomfortable night. We were not to be disappointed, **it was awful**. Some how or other Olivia managed to produce a lovely spicy meal of turkey and rice, which went down very nicely. Although wearing Sea Bands, after a few hours I began to feel sickish and at any moment expected to transfer my partly digested meal to occupants of Davy Jone's locker. Some how or other no such donation was given. When I got sick on the crossing from Plymouth to Brittany I was not wearing the Sea Bands. During the night the closest we could steer to our course was 180degrees or 35 degrees eastwards of our course. Next morning after a bad night, we had coffee and biscuits with a bar of chocolate for breakfast, neither of us had any inclination or desire for anything more substantial. At 1100hrs. we began crossing the Continental Shelf where the depth goes from over 4,000 metres to under 150 metres in just 25 miles. In rough weather this creates huge seas, we had it rough although I am told it could have been much worse. It's times like this while waiting for the next forecast and listening to a cricket match on Radio 4 you ask yourself the question "are we mad?" to which a lot of our friends including Margaret Dunne would say yes.

By 1700 hrs. we cleared the shelf and the seas began to moderate, the skies cleared and the long lost sun reappeared. Again at 2000 hrs. the cooking magician Olivia produced a lovely stew, which was consumed to the last morsel helped by a can of Coke for Olivia and 7UP for me. We very seldom consume alcohol while on passage.

How about this for a change of scene, 2200 hrs. “no sick feeling, flat sea, gently 10 knot breeze, the sky a carpet of stars, Aldebaran going in the right direction” it’s magic and the answer to the earlier question is “ you can keep your cricket match or other land sport, we are not mad, this is what sailing is all about”. 2300 hrs. and I am going to bed, Olivia is on watch for the next 2 or 3 hours. While I can rely on her to stay awake during her watch, I regret to say she does not have the same confidence in me staying awake. She keeps saying she catches me fast asleep on watch, I try to reassure her that I must have only closed my eyes as she came up the companionway..

Sunday morning saw us much rested and tucking into a substantial breakfast. The wind was very light force 1 or less. With an estimated arrival time at La Coruna of 0400 hrs on Monday morning and not wishing to make a strange landfall in the dark for fear of getting caught in fishing gear, we decided to divert to Ria de Ribadeo about 75 miles East of La Coruna. Our estimated time of arrival there was 2200 hrs on the Sunday night.

During the day we saw our first whales of the trip.

With good leading lights we made an easy entrance and tied up inside the harbour wall thus completing our crossing of the Bay of Biscay in 60 hours and covering 325 miles. This diversion would add an extra 50 miles to La Coruna, but we were not in a hurry. Ahead of us along the harbour wall was “Belle Epoque” an English yacht crewed by Ted & Diana Dalton. Ted helped us tie up and later confessed how impressed he was at the way we sailed in under mainsail, I had to admit that we were so tired that we had forgotten to take it down after starting the engine. Having unwittingly berthed at the Custom boat berth we were awakened at 0400 hrs. and asked to move further along the quay, they were I must say very courteous and helpful.

The next few days were spent visiting, in company with Belle Epoque, the Rias del Barquero and Cedeira, both of which were delightful stopovers before arriving in La Coruna on Wednesday 18th August. This was exactly one month since leaving Howth during which time we covered 960 miles. On route we met many new friends some of whom are also sailing on the ARC, (Atlantic Rally for Cruisers) from the Canaries with us.

We had been looking forward to our very good friends Riocard and Muriel O’Tiarnaigh joining us in La Coruna to day and cruising to Bayona with us. However we were disappointed to receive a phone call this morning to say they could not get a standby flight.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Pat & Olivia Murphy,

yacht ALDEBARAN in La Coruna, Spain.