

# **Sailing Around Britain with Wendy and Jasper**

## ***Introduction***

### **Experience**

I started sailing at age 5 when my father bought his first Hillyard, he had six altogether, and Tony Powell had input into several being foreman of the 12 shop. At 20 I bought and restored a Norwegian Folkboat and wanting to learn to sail that better joined the RORC.

The folkboat is a wet boat and very cramped and in the mid 70's I started to look for something bigger and happened on a Hustler 30. A lovely sailing boat but still too wet. A Gladiator followed and then a Hallberg Rassy 38. This comfortable boat was desperately wanted by a farmer and he offered me an undecidable pile of dosh enabling me to order a HR42.

### **Ambition**

I had during this time married and inherited a business and run it for some years with modest success. I started to generate an ambition to sail around Britain when I retired. No children had arrived and I could fully indulge my enthusiasm for boating. The ambition remained lodged in the mind. As business was getting less rewarding and more frustrating with increasingly burdensome legislation squashing the freedom, the idea of retiring inevitably took form and with it the potential freedoms of sailing away. Sailing the coast of France has the disadvantage of having French sailors around, they are not my cup of tea. Belgium are too officious, the Dutch kind, gentle but restrictive. They all speak foreign languages and eat foreign food. Around the British coast they speak my language and would leave us be.

### **Crew**



The dinghy and liferaft were professionally serviced and the outboard checked over.

October has both water and air heating by Eberspacher and both were removed and taken away for service. The fuel tank was emptied, cleaned and the fuel lines all replaced with nitrile and cunifer pipes to cope with the new biofuels.

Additional lightweight sail covers were made which were quick and easy to fit with the lazy jacks in place

A see through cocoon was made to fit the aft side of the cockpit hardtop to provide a dry shelter for use both at sea and in harbour.

New radar and chart plotter was installed in the cockpit allowing pilotage data to be visible from the helm.

Ventilators had fly screens fitted and a hatch net cover was made to keep out the Scottish Airforce.

A cold water wet suit was added to scuba gear on board.

The Clyde Cruising Club recommends at least 60m of anchor chain, my old chain was taken out and 100m of new chain loaded. 30m of the old chain was retained in a new stowage for attachment to the spare 45lb CQR.

Fender boards were made up to fit tidily inside the forward stanchions, two smaller ones being more flexible and manageable than one large one.

Half a dozen small diameter 10m nylon breast ropes were made up to act as springs in the event we were moored to another boat or pontoon in rough conditions.

Memory foam toppers were made for the bunks in the aft cabin.

An offshore first aid kit was put together with a mass of our own choice medications.

## **Skipper**

I enrolled on a course at Simon Keeling's weather school and over two days had drummed into me the entire syllabus for a masters degree in the subject. How much sunk in remained to be seen.

A Radio course with Bob Smith of YachtCom at Warsash gave me a one to one day handling VHF DSC and SSB weather data receiving.

## **Crew**

We visited the Musto outlet at Ashford and bought additional thermal underwear sets, hats, gloves and boots at sensible prices.

We both attended a First Aid course at the AYC, which was made good fun by Sue Bush

## **Food**

A visit to M&S provided a selection of quality tinned food and sufficient was purchased for 14 days. We also took enough flour to make our own bread for 4 months.

The boat fridge is a cooled cave with top entry and I had wire cage baskets made with hinged lids. These baskets, 14 of them, allowed easy access to the contents and permitted the fridge to be filled without crushing items at the bottom.

We have a three burner cooker with oven and a microwave.

## **Route**

The first decision to make was which way round, clockwise or anti. I chose clockwise as the prevailing winds and currents seemed to make it an obvious choice for us leaving from the south coast and leaving from central southern England meant splitting the prevailing south westerlies into two segments. Then each harbour, on a simple circuitous route, was looked at and assessed. Factors included in the assessment were access to shelter, mooring facilities and access to shore. We needed to walk the dog before and after a trip. From the list of suitable harbours a series of passages then evolved, with durations of eight to fourteen hours, between harbours.

## **Planning routes**

The boat has an onboard computer fully integrated with the instruments and its own GPS. It runs Seapro navigational software and their electronic charts with tidal streams and weather overlays. Through the winter, using Seapro with an electronic chart on a PC at home, each passage was planned in minute detail and waypoints placed for each sector of a route. Each waypoint

was placed away from the obvious position to minimise collision risk and checked for safety and convenience. Every route was numbered and each waypoint was tagged with its route number followed by its sequence number in the route.

All these waypoints were then saved and taken on board and stored on the onboard computer. They were then transferred in one block of over 700 waypoints, to the Raymarine chart plotter in the cockpit.

I prefer Admiralty charts and a catalogue of their charts was obtained and the already large portfolio of owned charts was recorded. A list of charts to be purchased was prepared, taking advantage of the Folio sets available where a sailing area is covered by a pack of charts for something less than half the price of individual buys. I hawked the list around the London Boat Show and did a deal with Kelvin Hughes to supply the lot.

The Clyde Cruising Club Scottish pilot books were purchased along with a new Reeds and some East Coast pilot guides from Imray.

## **Trial**

Having completed all the usual winter tasks and with everything cleaned and checked and serviced October was launched in late March and returned to her berth in Gosport. A last few items added and early in April we packed some food and went off to Gosport. Here we disconnected from the shorepower, and lived on board for four days. We went sailing in far too much wind and essentially established any holes in the preparations. We made bread, shredded the masthead instruments and lived well in horrid weather. We had four days going nowhere establishing all was ready.

The weather then set fair, and looked like staying that way so we set our departure day to be Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April. That was Easter and being a sailor and not being in the slightest bit superstitious, I did not want to set out on a Friday. We could also join the AYC cruise which was stopping in Gosport for the Good Friday night.

On the Wednesday of the final week we packed all our clothes and took them down to the boat. All the boat systems were started, fridge, instruments and computer. On the Thursday all the perishable food was taken down and stowed. We were ready for the off and we went home, cleaned and put our cars away, completed the SORNs and sent off the tax refund claims. On

Good Friday morning we walked away from our home and caught the train to Portsmouth.

## ***Trip***

### **Passages**

Joining the AYC Easter cruise made Lymington our first stop, after which we went off down the south coast in lovely weather, but at Lands End it changed.



A tough punch up the north Cornish coast got us into Padstow just before a two day gale over the May Day bank holiday. On the Monday a bunch of Pembrokeshire Cruisers set off home with a 7 in the forecast and we waited a day for a SW5. The Bristol Channel was fine and Milford Haven large. A couple of nights in Milford and then off round The Mumbles and missing out Fishguard we did the 99 miles to Pwllheli. This was a horrid entrance with the fairway buoy lost in the surf off the beach. Eventually located we approached the first buoy, indicating a very narrow channel. With the port

hand buoy virtually on my waterline the rock mole seemed only 5 m away to starboard. The depth alarm going all the time. Once safely inside we went aground. The council had decided not to dredge the channel because most of the bertholders were not Welsh and the marina had been built for the Welsh.

Leaving Pwllheli half an hour later than planned following advice on the tide state, we went aground again. When we finally got free of this wretched place we were atleast an hour late for our slack water tide gate at Bardsey Island. We met some ghastly seas here and then romped up the Anglesey coast losing the favourable tide well before Holyhead.



A walk around Holyhead the next day was more frightening than being in the wrong parts of Cape Town at night with boarded up shops, drunks in doorways, squatters, needles, bottles and other social detritus everywhere.

A reasonable sail to Douglas in overcast and damp conditions ended with a radio row with the HM over berthing. He stuck us on the wall and I wanted to go to a finger berth.



He won the first round but the next morning I found a Sigma 41 on a finger, showing I was not too big, and I was permitted to take a berth.

It rained virtually all the time in the IOM. Taking the buses we explored, at Peel we sat outside a pub having a sandwich in the rain because none would allow a dog in. Douglas was lovely.

The sail to NI was a great one on Wendy's birthday, so fast we arrived off Strangford two hours early and had to motor up the narrows against 5kn of tide. Portaferry was pretty and Stangford on the other side lovely too. Nice people. The marina manager was a day time worker at Shorts Aircraft factory and this was his evening job. A large motor boat came in shortly after we arrived and hit the pontoon we were on with a huge thump. No fenders on that side. No bulwarks on the other side. The owner had set off from Bangor for Dublin and had hit a big wave. It had demolished the port side bulwarks, and his wife had broken her arm when thrown off the loo. The lifeboat was called and took her off. Then they caught a rope around a prop and the lifeboat was called again. The owner got off put the boat up for sale and went home. The boat was now in the hands of a knowledgable and caring delivery crew!!



An easy sail round from Strangford to Bangor where we sat out a Force 11 violent storm that destroyed over 200 boats around Oban in Scotland. We took the bus to lovely Belfast. Then up to Glenarm, the pits. I telephoned Ron Goldsmith to ask which restaurant he recommended following his visit last year. There were none and only one fly blown pub.



From Glenarm across the North Channel to Cambletown. As the sail was going so well we decided to skip Cambletown and carry on up between the Mull of Kintyre and Arran. But the weather dramatically changed, it started to blow quite hard and rain heavily. We never saw the Mull or Arran again, going all the way to Portavadie on radar and plotter.

Portavadie was posh but isolated so we took the ferry and spent a day in Port Tarbert, lovely and busy with the Scottish Southern Series taking place (their Cowes Week). Sadly the weather only permitted morning racing as the afternoons were cancelled in the gales.

So we slipped out of Portavadie and sailed gently up to Ardrissaig to enter the Crinan canal, at the almost insistence of Ron G. What a good idea of his, as usual. It was lovely and the canal transit ticket allows four nights, which we took full advantage of and loved. We did the Crinan with just the two of us, With Wendy on the boat and me ashore it worked a treat.



From Crinan out into Dorus Mor, through the Sound of Luing and inside Kerrara Island we arrived in busy Oban. Re victualled we went up the Sound of Mull to pretty Tobermory where it rained and rained.



Had fun with a

scallop boat on the visitors pontoon here. Leaving Tobermory we motored out and rounded Ardnamurchan Point, the most westerly point of mainland Britain, inside Much Eigg and Rum, through the Sound of Sleight and into the Loch Alsh. We moored up in the tiny visitors harbour of Kyleakin with an HR54. This is the home of Ring of Bright Water.



When the gales abated we slipped under the Skye bridge and sailed up the Minch having been moved over to allow underwater weapons testing to take place. Again we were progressing so well we skipped Ullapool and pressed on to Loch Inver, a pretty place even in the rain and a walk the next day was very interesting, including the fish landing warehouse where the three lorries outside all had Spanish plates. On arrival a little fishing boat came in and I went round to chat at the nearby steps. I asked if I could buy some fish from him and he gruffly said “No”. “I’ll give you some”. He then filled a Tesco carrier bag with live langoustine.

Leaving the next day we had a SW going NW forecast with quite a breeze. The wind was dead on the nose and as we rounded the XX headland so the wind veered and by the time we were on course to KLB it was still dead on the nose. A tough ride round but Loch Inchard and KLB were something else. In the narrowish channel between high rock faces there is a rock in the middle, marked by a N cardinal and frequently hit by fishing boats!

In KLB we joined four other boats and when a lovely Contessa 32 came in we were 6, making the largest number of visiting boats they had had at one time. The locals came down to take pics of us. We were invited to the fish auction, were shown over a new state of the art trawler and had a party on October for all the yachties. It rained and rained and it took me a whole morning to refuel carrying a can from the fish dock back and forth in the pouring rain. Still atleast it was less than 70p a litre!

When the weather improved three boats left during the evening for the Orkneys, one was going on to Norway, one was going to Pierowall and one, a Contessa 32, was going to the Shetlands – an Easyjet pilot living in Midhurst. We left at 0300 the following morning. It was full daylight.

The passage to Stromness was perfect with a light southerly to take us across the top of Scotland and when it backed to a SE4 we altered course to NE to take us into Hoy Mouth. We then enjoyed and explored Mainland, Ronaldsay and Hoy sharing a car with another crew and loved the scenery and the very atmospheric Scapa Flow, where the German fleet scuttled itself after the first world war.



We then sailed out of Stromness, through Scapa and out into the Pentland Firth, the most dreaded tideway in the British Isles. We arrived 10 minutes

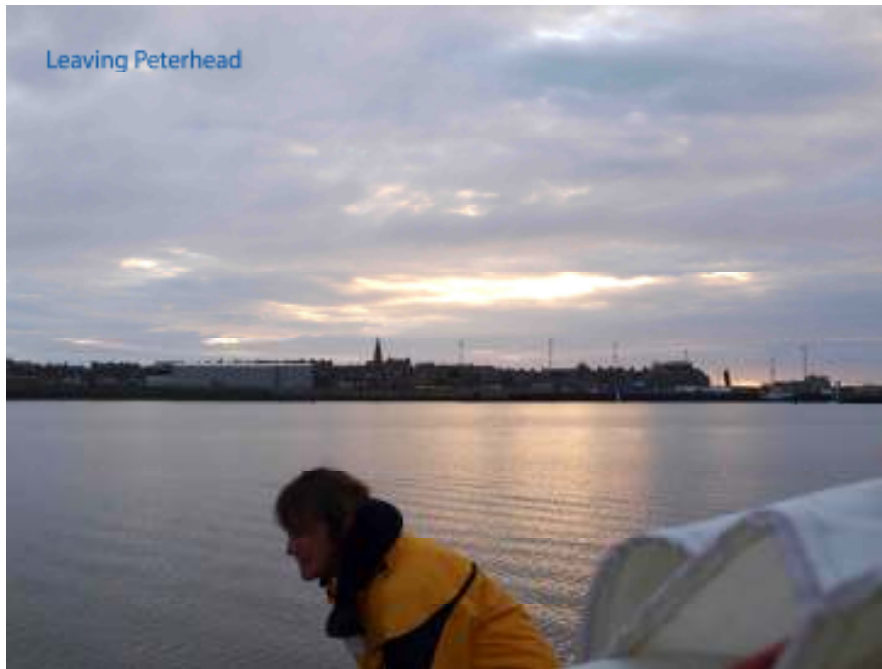
early and the tide was still running westwards. 20 minutes later it was running east with a vengeance and we sailed all the way to Wick. Not the prettiest of places but good harbour, easy access and a HM who asked, when calculating our overnight fees, if we wanted electricity. “Yes please” I said – wrong answer he said and charged just for the berth.

From Wick we went south across the Firth of Forth direct to Lossiemouth, missing out Helmsdale and enjoyed Armed Forces Day here with our very own Red Arrows display. Spectacular as always. Lossiemouth was a nice little place and we were the only Brit boat visiting with three Dutch. Whitehills was next after a raining shortish



passage. The entrance is very small and once inside there was just space for us to turn. Not a very exciting harbour marred by a fatal accident offshore the previous night, the search was ongoing. The next day we pressed on around Rattray Head and south again to Peterhead.

This is a huge port service the offshore oil and gas industry. The marina is in the SW corner, miles from anything and as we trudged off in heavy rain for victuals a car stopped and offered us a lift. The lady driver had her husband with her, he was a trawler skipper and was catching cod, by the ton. He made a call on his mobile while we were driving and spoke in a language we could not understand a word of. It was Doric, something from the old contacts with Scandinavia, Prussia and Holland. We were driven right to the shop we wanted, bought our supplies and walked the three miles back.



Friends had said they would join us Arbroath and so we left Peterhead very early to make the passage down, arriving in time for the lock gates, and missing Stonehaven – a wall side berth in the outer harbour.



Arbroath was lovely with plenty of smokehouses around the small perimeter. We left there on the lock opening the next morning and sailed across the Cromarty Firth to Eyemouth, a very interesting entrance. When just outside I

called all ships advising my imminent entry suggesting any vessel wishing to leave might wait as I would occupy the whole entrance.



Eyemouth was a pretty village in fabulous scenery. My best man's father had two boats built there, the Eyemouth Boat Co then built the Inchcape series based on a fishing boat hull – lovely solid boats built to take anything the sea could throw. Now sadly gone but the yard was still working refurbishing life boats.

From Eyemouth we crossed the border and visited Amble, a mistake as it is tidal and Blythe a few miles further was 24hour access, however we slipped out of this strange place and later entered the Tyne at North Shields where up river we locked into the very nice new marina. All facilities but no shops, so no food, and outside was really just waste land awaiting redevelopment. One night was enough but the forecast was lousy so a telephone call secured us the only pontoon space in the centre of Newcastle. We went up the Tyne past famous names like Swan Hunter, International paints and moored right by the Millennium bridge in the centre of Newcastle. Opposite the Baltic contemporary art gallery and close to the bridges and the Sage Music arena.

From our floating base we explored, by bus, Hexham, Housestairs and Hadrian's wall as well as much of Newcastle city centre. With a better forecast we set off down the Tyne and south to Hartlepool to meet the monkey hangers. Here in the early 1800s a French privateer was washed onto the rocks in a storm. All the crew perished but a monkey, dressed in a French sailor's uniform was found alive in the rigging. The monkey was captured, taken ashore and tried in a court. Found guilty they hung the poor creature.



South from Hartlepool, past the huge industrial complexes of Teesside, we entered the idyllic Whitby where we enjoyed walking around the abbey, where all the gravestones showed their occupants dying in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were all over 90 years old. We enjoyed supper at the Magpie, allegedly the best fish and chip restaurant in town.

A blustery period followed when we sailed from Whitby to Grimsby in 30 knots plus. Up the Humber Grimsby was ghastly, I can think of nothing good to say about it. Leaving we sailed to Wells next the sea arriving somewhat earlier than planned. Wells is a very shallow entrance and a

tortuous route in so we had a pilot come out and guide us in, thank goodness.



The HM told us to follow him and gave verbal instructions over the radio too. On arrival he put a man ashore to take our lines and I thanked him for good instructions and clear directions, then asked to be excused because I needed to change my underwear. In Wells friends joined us for the weekend and we enjoyed meeting others who have a weekend home there.

Leaving Wells we sailed across the top of Norfolk, through the first of those stupid windmills and down into Lowestoft. A lovely marina belonging to the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club. Its clubhouse was friendly and welcoming and we had a great supper in there with two other circumnavigators, both single handed, one in a 17 footer and the other a 25 footer.

Then down the coast to Harwich. Up the Orwell and into Suffolk Yacht Harbour, a lovely privately run marina in a very rural setting. Here we met up with friends who keep their boat there and had a jolly day with them. Then more friends joined us and we took ourselves up the river to Ipswich and back just exploring by water for a change.

We had passed the Deben and I wanted to see it having read so much about it. We called the HM and gave guidance on the entry times, as the bar is very mobile, and we slipped up there for the night. £5 for a mooring off Ramsholt Quay and a nice meal ashore overlooking the water. The next morning, we walked Jasper early and dropped the mooring about 0600 to go back down to Harwich where we stayed on the town quay for a couple of hours waiting for the tide. Harwich is not a lovely place. We slipped at noon and sailed across the Thames estuary. Passing through the gaps I was looking for a buoy which marked the entrance to the last gap between the sandbanks but it was missing, so sure of our position we set off down the gap in amongst more wretched windmills. A guardship came on the radio recommending yachts do not use Fishermans gap but go further west to the next gap, as workboats were busy in the gap assembling the windmills. He was ignored and we entered Ramsgate, chock a block with races doing Ramsgate Regatta.



With no space in the outer harbour we were eventually allowed into the inner where we were reluctantly given a one night only permit.

It was cool and dank as we headed out of Ramsgate and took the gaps south through the Goodwins in a good NE breeze. The sail around South Foreland and approaching Dover was great, I checked with Dover Harbour and as we were more than a mile off they advised caution, that was all. Gradually the wind died as we approached Dungeness and we motored the rest of the way to Eastbourne. Not really our sort of place, but it is a fine marina with lots of everything.



On the next morning to Brighton in calm, fine weather and a nice afternoon in Brighton marina was followed by a happy evening with Ron G and Lyn. On the next morning closing to be a few yards off the beach at Rustington where my mother and her neighbours had come on to the shingle to wave us past. And then approaching Littlehampton members of the AYC came out in their boats to welcome us home which was lovely. Sadly the Littlehampton harbour dues were the biggest rip off of the trip.



On the Saturday we joined the AYC flotilla to Chichester and had an enjoyable evening at the Chi YC followed the following afternoon by a nice sail back to Portsmouth on our 100<sup>th</sup> day out.

### ***Conclusion***

For quite a few harbours we had telephoned in advance to check suitability for us and berth availability, this helped no end as we entered and made second contact by VHF

For most passages we checked in with the coast guard giving a brief passage plan and ETA. On one occasion I failed to report in on arrival and called the next day with apologies. On a second occasion I received a call from the coastguard asking if I was OK as I had not called in. Once assured all was well he gently suggested I made sure I reported our arrival as he noticed I had missed previously!

Quite a few times I had to use a mobile phone to report in as VHF did not work in several harbours.

At the end of every passage a thorough check of the engine, seacocks and steering was undertaken, the rig was visually and physically checked before each passage.

We had travelled 1914 miles, visited 42 ports, met some super people and a few nutters. The average passage was 40 odd miles, seven hours ish.

It was a wonderful experience with no frightening moments, but we picked our battles – only ones we could win. At the end we did not want to come home and had become quite content living on our boat. It was a lovely simple life, living by the tides and daylight.

We kept the boat and ourselves scrupulously clean to avoid infection and upsets.

The boat was checked very thoroughly every month, the engine serviced and mast checked half way round. October was a lovely cosy home for us. We had no problems with the kit on board and believe that the life style was good. We used the heating every day, morning and evening, until Grimsby and had hot showers on board every other day at least. She sailed and motored easily and was about as big as you could get in some of the harbours. Her draft was an issue in Wells but elsewhere it was comforting to know she would handle waves and weather with ease. We never ran short of fuel, water, amps or food.

What next, the question is still unanswered with the Baltic and Spanish Rias both tempting us.

Michael & Wendy Marston (and, not forgetting, Jasper)