A Journey so Far

The Travels of Nausikaä

This is the story of an improbable journey, written as if I were to tell it to good friends over a bottle of wine. Or three.

I kept the story as factual as memory allows; my logbook keeping me honest as far as winds, seas, courses, places and dates are concerned. That said, this is not a work of historiography, it is simply a story.

All opinions are strictly my own, but then again, I am entitled to them and to express them.

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FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

When did this all start, I wonder, and how? Now, years later, it seems difficult to tell exactly. Memories get hazy at the edges, dates shuffled. Too many things happening in between then and now, making it difficult to pinpoint a day, to select a single root-cause to the cascade of events that would follow, like domino keys toppling one-another in a row.

It may have started one sunny and cool Sunday afternoon at my house in Bracknell, England. I received an unexpected call from an old friend, Daniel Bastreri, and an invite to visit him and his wife Dorothy the following weekend in Lowestoft. I remember consulting with my wife Kaori and, since she said we had nothing planned on that weekend, it was OK to accept.

Daniel was a former university classmate of mine and connected to me through quite a few common friends and acquaintances, all of them from the old days in Uruguay. Despite this, once we got our degrees, we followed different professional and geographical paths, and lost track of each other.

Twenty-five years later, again through common friends, we managed to find one-another at a barbecue in my back garden, where to my great surprise I learned that he too was living in England. We spent that afternoon catching up with the other´s life story and envisaging ways to avoid losing track of each other once again. Dani´s invitation was one of those ways.

That weekend was memorable for many reasons. It was a long drive from Bracknell in the SW of England to Lowestoft on the coast of East Anglia; 250 miles, much of it through B roads where Kaori and I got lost a couple of times. It was also my first sight of the North Sea. Cold, windy, choppy, greenish-brown, thoroughly unwelcoming North Sea. I would have years to get acquainted with it, by choice and chance, but little did I know that at the time.

A thoroughly enjoyable weekend for all concerned as I recall. Kaori and Dorothy seemed to be getting on famously with each other, leaving the boys to their own devises. Dani and I applied ourselves to reminiscing about old times, talking about common friends, work, politics, and personal lives, while sipping wine standing up for hours around the barbeque.

This is a South African tradition, not a British one. Barbeques, or braais, are a serious matter. Veeeery serious! You start with a half petrol drum packed high with dry hardwood. Old, uprooted vine stock is best. Then you build the fire. Everybody, stand back! With that amount of wood, the fire climbs high enough to raise alarm among the neighbours, and the embers reach temperatures to smelt bronze. Then it´s the time to sit back and enjoy a bottle or three, waiting for the whole conflagration to die down a bit. With anything less than one hour wait for the fire to be “ready”, there was not enough wood in the drum to begin with.

So, it was sitting around the barbeque that Dani mentioned he had a little sailboat, a 25-footer called Esperanza, and asked whether Kaori and I would like to come sailing with Dorothy and him one day. Maybe that was it, the first domino key to topple. Maybe it all started then.

Dani´s Invitation

Over the following weeks and months, a strange alchemy was at play in my heart and in my head. Up to that point, any dream I had related to the sport of sailing had been long consigned to the box in the attic where one keeps old useless stuff. You know; a sepia photograph of great-grandfather, dusty scrap books from childhood, an Airfix model Spitfire, a discoloured Polaroid from a junior-high

dance. And yet, as I discovered thereafter, some of that stuff proved to be less than altogether useless, and not all that dusty.

Following Dani´s invitation to go sailing, the plan was hatched to, the four of us: Dani, Dorothy, Kaori, and I, enrol on the RYA Costal Skipper course. One was soon to be delivered at the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club in Lowestoft. The course was planned over four two-day sessions on Saturday and Sunday mornings, which meant Kaori and I had to drive four consecutive weekends to Lowestoft, 3.5 hours away from Bracknell. We would drive to Lowestoft on Friday evening, stay at Dani and Dorothy's place, and drive back to Bracknell Sunday afternoon.

It was beginning of autumn then. After some cajoling, I persuaded Kaori to join in and do the course with me. My argument to overcome her objections about long weekly drives and cost, was that this would be a nice activity we could do together, in the company of good friends, and by the seaside while the weather was still good.

After a month long of classroom tutoring, we all walked out with our sailing certificates, very happy it was finally over, but also satisfied of the time well spent with dear friends, and with a firm commitment to go sailing on Dani´s boat as soon as the weather broke the following year.

It was during one of those weekends that I got my first glimpse of Nausikaä. She was on the hard in a little yard on the north side of lake Lothing, opposite Lowestoft, hidden by the rusting hulls of iron barges and rotting wooden fishing boats all around her, propped up by petrol drums and odd bits of timber, and looking very sad and forlorn indeed, after what appeared to be years of abandonment and neglect.

Lake Lothing is not a lake, but a tidal creek that connects The Broads with the sea. The Broads is the easternmost part of an extensive area of channelled marshes that formed the backbone of the transport network of grain, coal, and iron ore in England during the XVIII and XIX centuries, all of which was moved on barges to the North Sea ports for transport elsewhere.

The very first sight I caught of Nausikaä was from afar, from the Broads dike bridge. There is a pub at the side of the bridge, *The Wherry*. Dani and I were sitting outside in the tepid autumn English sun one of those week ends, when I called his attention to two thick, shortish black masts, that appeared in the distance too close together to be on different boats. I could only see the masts, without any spreaders, pointing like accusatory fingers at the cloudy sky. They looked very odd. Dany said he had seen the boat before, a ketch, and that it had been there for years. *Weird thing, that bird…* Dani said, while giving me indications on how to get to the yard.

I made a mental note to go and see the boat the next opportunity I had. This was only out of sheer curiosity: certainly, I had no notion, intention, nor plan to buy this boat, or any boat, in the foreseeable future.

Dominoes Toppling

The events of that winter, and much of the two years that followed, set the frame that determined the course of our lives, Kaori´s and mine. We decided to separate, after a decade and a half of marriage. Other changes followed my separation. Change of job, change of daily habits, change of friends, slowly coming out to the surface to breathe, and getting in sync again with the compass of the swell of a bachelor's life.

Following the emotional turmoil of the breakup, a realisation appeared blindingly clear before my eyes: to remain sane and functional I needed to keep busy, with a multitude of demanding and absorbing activities and concerns that kept my mind occupied, and my time used up to the full every waking hour. Sticking to that therapy was of the outmost importance.

How to conjure interesting and demanding pursuits out of thin air that would keep me occupied? Well, apart from my job, there was “stuff” to do. Some major DIY projects to undertake in the house, change the car, a social life to reconstruct. Maybe I could even throw me a girlfriend, in time. Meanwhile, why not having a look at that old box in the attic for inspiration? The one full of old dusty stuff? Why not indeed.

Love at First Sight

Nausikaä, the first time I saw her close up

In the end, Dani and I never got to sail together in Esperanza, with or without the women. As the new year advanced and I got progressively busier, the opportunity never arose. Towards the end of that year Dani sold the boat.

In one of my occasional visits to Lowestoft after my separation, I went in search for the odd-looking two black masts I had glimpsed upon the year before. The yard was closed that day, so there was no-one to let me in. I returned the following day to have a good look at the boat.

The first impression I got was a mixture of wonder and bewilderment. I had never seen a boat like that in my life! There is a saying about boats and aeroplanes: if they ***look*** good, they´ll probably sail or fly good also. Well, this one looked all wrong to my eyes, as if it had been put together with bits and pieces salvaged from other crafts. The masts were thick black sticks without any support and seemed to be in the wrong place. The hull resembled that of a fishing boat, but with an odd piece sticking out from below the running straight keel. I learned later the boat had a secondary lift keel.

Despite her chubby, unsophisticated lines and seemingly unwieldy rig, the boat somehow conveyed to me the feeling of aplomb, seaworthiness, and dependability. A racer, she obviously was not. Judging by the size of the booms (what I assumed were the booms!), she carried two huge main sails, like a junk rig. I did not understand how a boat could achieve balance without any foresails. However, the amount of canvass aloft I estimated with a full head of sail was certain to be considerable and suggested a decent turn of speed.

I asked around the yard if I could be let in to have a look at the inside of the boat, but no-one had the keys. There was a *for sale* sign on the stern, so I took a snapshot with my phone and went home. Might as well speak to people on the *for-sale* sign. I was curious.

I distinctly remember musing, on the long drive back to Bracknell that day, with a half-smile on my face and with the tenderness of heart reserved exclusively for mongrel puppies and ugly babies, that a more utterly adorable boat, oh, I had never seen!

The Road Less Travelled

The strange alchemy in my heart I mentioned before was in fact a very slow catalyst being added to a substrate of basic compounds, and a chemical reaction taking place the ultimate result of which was entirely unpredictable.

The catalyst was the inner want for change in my life. The substrate of raw components included the remnants of ambitions, dreams, desire for personal achievement and excellence, and half-cooked visions of new things that could just be fun to do now that I was single again. But all those were partial, fractionary, and most were orphan of any context in my new personal situation. Like snippets of DNA floating about in a laboratory retort, what kind of primitive organism could come out by simply linking and recombining them all together? Would that contraption of genetic engineering be even viable and hold up to something I could recognise as "life"?

Dr Frankenstein had an easier job. When he was stitching arms, legs, and head together, he knew what specific purpose each one of those was supposed to fulfil. He had a blueprint, a plan. I did not.

As it happened to many before me, the way forward came to me in my sleep. Lying in bed early one morning, wide awake in the dark and waiting for the alarm clock to go off, I decided that my next great life achievement was going to be in seamanship.

Just like that! There was no point in going back through roads already trodden, I thought. It´s back-to-square-one time, and seamanship is the ticket. ***There*** was a journey I could undertake with the lightness of heart that confers the expectation of an uncertain outcome. No meaningful restrains, constraints, or conditions; nothing but possibilities and opportunities.

After all, if Robin Lee Graham could do it, so could I dammit!

Pros, Cons, and Compromises

With the zeal of the converted I applied myself to the task, project manager manual in hand, and with a near scientific methodological approach. Where to begin, and with what? The "what" was the easy part: (1) I needed a boat, (2) one that could be sailed single-handed with relative ease, and (3) with the carrying capacity to take me anywhere I may want to go to. I wish I knew then where that place was!

Robin's first boat, the *Dove*, was a 24-footer, and the guy crossed the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic oceans with it. His second boat, *The Return of the Dove*, was a 33-footer. In the absence of other better-defined prerequisites, that was as good a guideline as any, so I settled on a target of 30 feet overall length, plus minus, to conduct my search.

The price range of a sailing boat is directly related to its size (length) for any given age bracket. So is the ownership cost. Still, within that general rule, the price may vary by an order of magnitude between comparable boats of comparable age.

During those months of armchair research, it became clear I could not afford a newish (say, less than 20 years old) boat. It had to be an old cruiser, in reasonably good nic, without structural weaknesses, and easy to sail. The trade-off was the near certainty of having to invest considerable cash fixing existing problems and upgrading equipment and frightening amounts of elbow grease in personal labour to get the boat in cruising trim for open water.

The prospect was daunting but not fearsome. I was now in the enviable position of being able to spend my money without having to ask permission, I could spare the time, and I was willing to sweat the elbow grease. After all, I was not looking for a pleasant hobby here, I was looking for my next big thing.

Over the following eight months I trawled the internet for every bite of information I could find on architectural designs and builders, bought and read cover to cover *Principles of Yacht Design* by Larsson and Eliasson, Larry and Lin Pardey's *The Self-Sufficient Sailor* and a number of other generic boat design and sailing books and manuals for beginners. My previous sailing experience dated from my youth, was sporadic even then, and always as crew, never as skipper nor owner. Might as well consider myself an absolute beginner and get trained in all aspects of what constituted sailing and owning a boat.

I joined several naval architect, cruiser, sailor, and boat owner online forae to ask questions and query the experts, and I built a preliminary budget for the whole project.

The technical aspects, i.e. overall sailing characteristics, build quality, equipment requirements, comfort below deck, etc, soon became clear and relatively straight-forward to compare and contrast based on other people´s opinion.

The "easy to sail" single-handed requirement was another matter altogether. Opinions on that score were seldom objective, and if they were, they were nonetheless based on wildly diverging views of what constitutes "easy". I realised this requirement hinged mostly on the design of the rig. No amount of added sophisticated technology will make a boat easy to sail that is not already so by design.

A Hoyt-design Freedom 35 ketch with the original wishbone booms

To me, "easy" referred mostly to the configuration of the rig, and how the manoeuvre was set up (for instance, all running rigging redirected -or redirectable- to the cockpit), but I also considered the potential cost of maintaining and/or upgrading very expensive deck hardware: winches, roller and in-mast/boom furlers and a long list of etceteras. Minimising the number of gadgets that could break, rust, or jam, was also part of the definition of "easy" as far as I was concerned.

I looked first at traditional Bermudian rigs: sloops and ketches, as well as junk rigs of the nineteen eighties. But old boats in good condition are hard to come by. The ones that survive from that period in good shape had been restored and lovingly maintained and cared for by previous owners, naturally fetching a high price. I soon realised the *Nicholsons, Contessas, Moodies, Barbicans, Bowmans, Hallberg-Rassies, Nauticats*, and *Westerlies* I saw advertised for sale on the internet in the UK were, by-and-large, out of my budget. Sometimes way out of it!

Besides, they were all still Marconi sloops, or ketches, with a standard sail wardrobe of three or four sails, more in the case of a cutter. Too many to handle in a blow on my own, I thought. In paper, they did not seem particularly easy to sail single-handed in general, and none easier that any of the others within the list.

On this score the old *Freedom* rig (designed by Garry Hoyt in the early ´80) based on unstayed carbon fibre masts with large main and mizzen sails, seemed to win hands down when compared to

traditional Bermudian sloops. Two “main” sails of near equal size. That´s it. No jib or genoa, no downwind sails. The only concession to marginal added performance was a mizzen trysail for light airs, and a storm sail the size of a handkerchief, also on the mizzen mast. If I wanted to tack or gybe, all I had to do was turn the wheel. Modern junk rigs came a very close second.

This type of rig had also an irreverent-to-convention, deceptively sophisticated simplicity that very much appealed to me. The masts were keel-stepped, no standing rigging introducing structural stresses on the hull or coachroof, and no chainplates to inspect and maintain. The carbon fibre spars tapered from the base to the top and were flexible by design, allowing the mast to bend slightly on the top third and spill the wind from the top of the sail on a sudden gust. The whole setup insinuated a back-to-basics design approach that made use of sophisticated technology (carbon fibre was space-age material in the nineteen eighties) where it really mattered but dismissed, tongue-in-cheek, chromey, over-engineered, and outrageously expensive gadgets where it didn´t.

On the Con side, much of what I read about the rig highlighted that these boats were effective downwind sailors but unimpressive (or downright ineffective) close hauled, they were underpowered, slow, and bad pointers.

I must emphasize that all this analysis was strictly a paper exercise! Since I had never sailed anything but dinghies and small sloops before, I had no way to compare based on personal experience.

This quest to find the ideal boat for my needs became an evolutionary process. Whereas my understanding of the impossibility of finding the “right boat” grew, my set of requirements also mutated, and my ambition as to what I would do with the eventual choice of boat increased in scope disproportionate to the capabilities of the said boat.

I should have known better. I am a scientist after all. I should have included a control set in my experimental design.

Among the new requirements I added to the *must* list were wheel steering, a bimini, easy access to the engine compartment and through the companionway, wide decks, shallow(ish) draft, standing room in the cabin, separate heads, transom-hung rudder, deep cockpit, keel-stepped mast(s), blue-water capability… The list grew, and fewer and fewer 30 footers I came across within my budget seemed to fit the bill.

The local second-hand market in the UK also played a role in determining the available choice. The British tend to favour solid, traditional designs as cruising boats; long and bilge keelers with high ballast to displacement ratios, and with few concessions to innovative design. Consequently, many of the options available to me were not particularly spacious below deck, had low, shallow cockpits, poor storage capacity, and an internal layout that had changed little since the days of HMS Victory.

One evening, after a particularly frustrating day of search in the Yachtsworld, Boat, and Boatshed dot com of this world, and ready to give up to analysis paralysis, I decided to change tack. Evidently, there was not a boat out there with the right price tag that would tick all the boxes in my list. So, forget the comparative scorecards Rafa! Choose one that you like, one that appeals to you in most respects, one that speaks to you of safety and comfort, one that promises you to be ***fun*** to sail and spend time in. Use it as a benchmark. ***Then*** you can compare others to your choice and see if they measure up overall. But do it holistically, not item by item, feature by feature.

In the end, I arranged appointments with brokers to inspected in detail three boats that I thought summarised the scope of available choice: a *Fisher* 31, a *Rossiter Pintail* (28-footer), and a *Freedom*

30, the latter the owner of the two black masts I had seen almost a year before sipping beer at *The Wherry* in Lowestoft with my friend Dani.

A Fisher 31

The *Fisher* is really a motorsailer, built like a German panzer, that looks like a North Sea purse-seiner with sails added to it. It is very popular in and around the UK, and with proven seakeeping capabilities. The boat in question was in Bute, Scotland. Long drive from Bracknell! In the end, I cancelled the appointment. By chance I discovered another Fisher 31 (exactly the same model) moored across the creek at The Haven marina in Lowestoft. I spoke to the owner and asked for a guided tour of the boat. Best thing I could have done for my purposes. There´s nothing one sailor likes better than showing off his boat to another sailor!

I drove to Plymouth to have a look at the Rossiter. The yard had two models on a Maurice Griffith design, the *Golden Hind*, a gaff-rigged 31-footer, and the *Pintail*, a 28-footer. Both shallow draft bilge-keelers, traditional British design. I was interested in the Pintail, with its charmingly old-fashioned lines, flush deck, and abundance of wood features. A true classic. Undoubtedly, the boat´s lines were to fall in love with. If you like that sort of thing that is!

A Rossiter Pintail (28 footer)

However, as soon as I got below deck, I realised it was not the boat for me, no matter how charming her lines.

A Freedom 30 with the original wishbone booms.

This was a week-end cruiser, not a liveaboard for any length of time. The quality of the hardwood joinery below deck was superb, to be sure, but the cabin was also lugubriously dark, cramped, and the ventilation was poor. I could not crack an egg in the galley without banging my elbows against something, and I would get a good night sleep in the forecabin only if I were a child or a snake, the anchor chain chute going right through the middle of the triangular bed.

As said, HMS Victory revisited.

The last boat to inspect was the *Freedom* 30, in Lowestoft. I arranged a visit with the broker, and asked Dani to accompany me and provide me with a second opinion.

On the appointed day, the broker, a diesel mechanic from the yard, Dani and I, assembled under an annoying English winter drizzle to see the boat. I had asked the mechanic to start the engine, just to make sure it turned.

This *Freedom* 30 was an American design, built in the UK under licence by Fairways Marine of Humble, the same yard that built Fishers and other famous boats for many years. The hull design is by N.G. Herreshoff, based on US East Coast traditional cat boat fishing vessels, and the rig was designed by G. Hoyt. Impeccable pedigree, really. A moderate displacement long keeler but with a secondary lifting keel holding some of the ballast.

She had certainly seen better days and was in dire need of a good scrub; green and moss everywhere, but the boat seemed in good condition overall. Dani and I inspected the hull in detail looking for signs of osmosis blisters and found none. On deck, most of the running rigging would likely need replacing, but the deck fittings seemed OK, and I did not find any soft spots, cracks or large crazing in the GRP. Only cosmetic wood outside. Good… little maintenance, I thought. Below deck however, it was a revelation. Albeit not a very beamy boat (barely over 3 mts), the cabin looked refreshingly spacious and airy, this despite the intrusion of the thick mizzen mast right in the middle of it, and the mid table casing which housed the lift keel. On that overcast and gloomy day, there was still good light inside, and good ventilation. The cabin roof lining was sagging everywhere and would need replacing. There were some old signs of water ingress on the bulkheads, but on that occasion the boat was dry inside, even the bilge. There was decent storage space under the bunks in the cabin, and below the bed on the forecabin, and solid teak and mahogany furniture in the galley and throughout.

The diesel mechanic started the engine manually (the battery was dead) in a big puff of white smoke demonstrating that it was not ceased, which left me quite happy. Little that I knew at the time. That engine (a Volvo MD7A) never worked properly, and I ended up replacing it later. The mechanic must have lowered the compression to nothing to make it run that day!

A few things I made a mental note of: no gimballed cooker, although there was a gas installation onboard. Did the previous owners eat nothing but sandwiches and crisps while sailing? No hot water. No shore power. The keel lifting mechanism was manually operated through a line channelled from the keel casing inside the cabin, through the coachroof, and led to a jammer in the cockpit. According to the boat papers, the lifting keel weighted in at 700 lb. Well… that would have to change also! My ignorance: I still had no instinctive insight on how that boat could move forward at all under sail. The name: who on earth names a boat "*Wishbones*"???

That afternoon, over a few beers, Dani and I exchanged impressions. Dani liked some things, few, didn´t like or (like me) didn´t understand many others and was overall less than enthusiastic. It was evident we were looking at things from widely diverging points of view. He pointed out there was but one winch on the whole boat. *That´s just crazy!* he said, to which I replied with a big smile: *Yes! Isn´t that wonderful!?* I believe he thought the boat was an unholy contraption though he never said so explicitly. Dani also remarked I was not going to go anywhere fast on that chamber pot with masts (something I had already figured) and concluded his assessment with a call to caution on my part. *You cannot turn a pig into a hound,* he said. I did not reply to that but thought to myself: *No I can´t… but I can turn it into a very fast pig!*

Decision Time

So, decision-making time Rafa! After nearly one year of intensive research and analysis, what shall it be? I thought if I could not come up with a definite and conclusive opinion, I might as well move to a village in the Cotswolds, set up a woodworking workshop, and spend the rest of my days making bespoke furniture. Perhaps buy a camper van should I ever want to travel.

Of the three options I had before me, the Fisher was a known quantity. It was what it was: a good, robust, dependable British pig. There was little I could do to make it any faster, nor would there be ever any need to, as the entire boat negated the ambition of speed. The Pintail I had already discarded as unsuitable. The Freedom was appealing in several different ways, but an utterly unknown quantity to me in terms of sailing characteristics. I was still puzzling about the rig! Also, I had been looking for the larger model, the 35, but to my knowledge, none had been available for sale in the UK during my entire search.

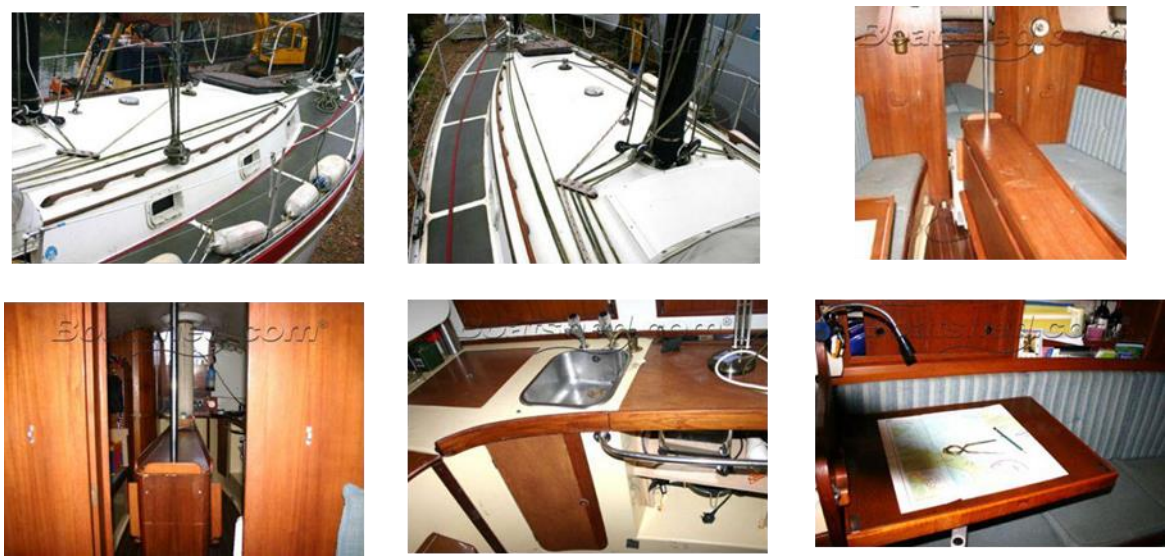
Important consideration: the Freedom was half the asking price as that of the Fisher in Scotland. Both boats would need a cash investment in repairs and upgrades. I could spend the sell price differential in making this Freedom the fastest and safest sow she could ever be.

In the end, the decision was made half-way between my head and my gut, which is not my heart. The Freedom spoke to me more clearly than the Fisher did. And she was saying in a quiet voice: *Go on Rafa, be brave. Get me fit and sexy again, and I´ll show you my mettle.*

The challenge was irresistible!

QUID AND ELBOW GREASE

The following day I phoned the broker in Lowestoft to arrange for a technical survey to be carried out. The chips were down. On May 30th, 2012 I received from the broker the signed purchase papers and became officially the owner of Nausikaä.



First pics of Nausikaä

These are the first pics I have of her, the morning after, when I drove to Lowestoft in a hurry to inspect my new toy and to organise transport from the yard to a permanent mooring.

Despite being a long drive from home, it made sense to secure a mooring in Lowestoft. The boat was already there, prices were comparatively reasonable and, most importantly, Dani and Dorothy were based in town, so I could shamelessly abuse their hospitality using their place as a base of operation for what I anticipated would be many months of work on the dry to "get her fit and sexy".

The professional survey I had commissioned ahead of buying the boat revealed a few concerns, but no structural weaknesses, and no major wear-and-tear items. Good as the survey was, however, I resisted the temptation towards complacency at its positive overall assessment. I ***knew*** more detailed inspection would reveal a multitude of illnesses unseen by the surveyor, or anyone else. Fixing one problem will indicate five other new problems that needed fixing also. Such is the lot of a boat owner's life.

The list of to-do items was already long and kept on growing alarmingly with every revision. The boat will have to be out of the water for a time, that was clear. The approach then was: Let's do everything that needs to be done, all the major work that can only be done in the dry, at once and all together, so when the boat goes back in the water, it does not have to come out of it for anything but normal annual maintenance.

My initial idea was to house the boat at The Haven marina. This was the largest marina in Lowestoft, had a 50-tonne lift, a spacious dry yard with water and electricity and, most importantly, an adjacent naval workshop that could handle all the major work required by Nausikaä. The operation of the marina was professional and the mooring fees, though not cheap by any means, were comparatively affordable with respect to those of other places in the vicinity of Lowestoft.

By chance however, I bumped into the mechanic that got the engine going on my first inspection visit with the broker and Dani. His name is Paul Sheader, and he just happened to be the owner of a small yard across Lake Lothing from the Haven marina. He had a rigging workshop in his yard, and 12 deep moorings on two pontoons.

Talking about the work I envisaged to do on Nausikaä Paul assured me that, other than the sandblasting of the hull, all work could be undertaken in his workshop, and he could let me have one of the deep finger pontoon moorings on his yard for little more than half what the Haven marina would charge me.

That, added to Paul's charming demeanour, no-nonsense talk, and budget-conscious approach to boating in general (he had been a submariner engineer with the Royal Navy and had his own boat in the yard) convinced me to switch and house the boat at his place. I figured making use of Paul´s extensive network of supplier pals and specialist workers in Lowestoft, not to mention his practical experience with everything related to floating things, would more than compensate in effort and pound sterling terms the smallness of the place and somewhat basic facilities.

I was right. It did!

The hull had to be cleaned down to the gelcoat, painted and antifouled. The naval workshop at the Haven marina agreed to do the sandblasting, and then apply coppercoat antifouling below the waterline, and I would paint the freeboard. Although expensive to do, coppercoating was the right choice for that boat, and it has proven worth the initial investment several times over in lower maintenance cost and effort through the years.

As all this had to be done under a roof, the boat had to be de-masted so it would fit through the door of the workshop hangar. One miserable December morning under a light snowfall five people, including Paul from the yard, his rigger Timothy, and a very nervous owner (aka me), took the masts off Nausikaä. Like everything else in life, easy to do if you know how in advance. *Loosen the aluminium rings on the coachroof and simply lift the masts up with a crane* – Tim, the rigger, said. Problem was that the masts were so tightly set on high-density rubber shoes around the rings that the crane was lifting the entire boat off its tripod stands by the masts. All four tonnes of it! Eventually, after a lot of sweat, nerves, and two cans of lubricating silicon spray the masts came off.

FIRST TO-DO LIST

#Sandblast hull below waterline down to gelcoat. Check for osmosis. Repair if required.

 # Apply 2 additional coats of gelcoat, and antifouling on top.

 # Paint hull freeboard

 # Check keel lift setup. Figure a way to mechanise this.

 # Service engine and make operational.

 # Replace dripless and gland on the prop shaft.

 # Remove sails and send off for repair and laundering

 # Remove running rigging. Replace as required.

 # Install calorifier

 # Replace batteries

 # Find sources of water ingress in the cabin. Fix leaks

 # Remove, check, replace ground tackle as required

 # Check all electronics. Fix or replace as required.

 # Check fridge compressor and make operational

 # Service all pumps, manual, freshwater, etc

 # Check all through-hull fittings. Replace as required.

Nausikaä de-masted in the dry

The poor girl was left looking a bit forlorn without her masts, but it was necessary. She would stay that way for almost the entire following year.

Jack of all Trades

That´s what you've got to be if you own a boat and are not a millionaire. Moreover, the "master of none" bit of the saying does not easily apply so someone like me, with a genetic predisposition to perfectionism. Any job I undertook, be it electrics, plumbing, carpentry, electronics, fiberglass casting, whatever! I demanded of myself the highest possible standard of outcome, which made the whole process twice as effort intensive, four times as long, and very, very frustrating at times.

[In my discharge, I must say I´ve mellowed out over the years. Put it down to age, or to learning the hard way. What started out aiming for "perfect", became "good". Today, if it is "good enough", then it is perfect]

Besides the obvious financial one, there are other advantages to the DIY approach. For starters, there is not an intimate nook in Nausikaä that I have not explored fully and in exhaustive detail. Any repair, upgrade, or maintenance done on any system, during that period or ever since, is a known quantity, i.e. I ***know*** if it was done right or less so, why in either case, and what is likely to fail, i.e. the weak link in the overall solution. The DIY approach makes diagnosing and fixing problems with the

All furniture off, lining off!

equipment infinitely easier, on the dock and under way.

During those months of work on the dry I stripped the boat bare inside. The lining on the roof was sagging so I decided to replace it. This was the first occasion I had to creatively comment on the IQ of Fairways Marine fitters. First of many!

The lining throughout the inside of the boat had been glued to the bare fiberglass in huge single sheets of material, ***before*** the furniture was fitted. The lining was vinyl with a thin underside backing of polyethylene foam. Once the fragile foam started degrading (probably within months of fitting), it came away from the GRP and was impossible to repair or replace in discreet sections. Additionally,

the portholes had been fitted from the inside ***over*** the vinyl lining, making water ingress through the gaps an absolute certainty, no matter how much silicone sealant was used.

New calorifier

In summary, I had to remove every single stick of furniture in the saloon to get rid of the old lining. But as said of the DIY approach, this gave me the opportunity of inspecting the bulkhead bases, repairing rotten spots, patching the joints with additional GRP, cleaning and painting the whole interior. Bit by bit I also took home and restored in my garden workshop all the (irreplaceable at today´s prices!) solid teak and mahogany panels, replaced damaged backing plywood, replaced rusted and crumbling bronze screws for stainless steel ones, and devised a way to refit the furniture so that it could be easily removed for maintenance.

I replaced all portholes (which I had to import from the US), and cut, stained, polished, and fitted new wood panels for the sides of the coachroof, fixed all leaks through the screws securing the toe rail… None of the above, none of it, was part of my initial to-do list of critical items. This only confirmed the 5-to-1 law of boat ownership. Five new problems discovered to every one problem fixed.

Mechanized keel lifting mechanism; a truck's winch.

In the course of that year, I had the old MD7A engine removed and sent to a local Volvo mechanic with the following mandate: get it to run reliably or keep it! With the engine compartment now empty, I had the guys at the workshop install a new 70 ltr fuel tank, a calorifier, shore power, and new dripless gland on the drive shaft. I also crawled like a snake on that hole to steam-clean and apply bilge paint throughout the compartment, service the bilge pumps, replace old hoses and hose clips, replace almost the entire pressurised freshwater system (the old one was copper and was leaking like a sieve) and build a secure shelf for the engine battery above the waterline. The battery was originally just lying at the bottom of the bilge!

I also engineered and fitted a mechanised solution to the keel lifting system, in the form of a 900 W off-the-shelf 4X4 truck front winch, with a bespoke bracket Tim built for me from 6 mm stainless sheeting. It looks a bit odd, sitting on top of the centre table in the cabin, but it works just fine at the flick of a switch.

Since all the furniture was out, I also took the opportunity to build a new cabinet to house electronics in the cabin, above the chart table. What was originally shelved storage with sliding

New instrument panel on the port side above the chart table

doors, I transformed into a trapdoor cabinet to hold an additional switch panel, the new VHF, a repeater for the wind instrument, and several individual switches, dials, and charging USB ports for portable devises.

To cut a very long story short, nearly two years passed before I could take the boat to sea! The work carried out on Nausikaä progressed slowly and haphazardly, as my professional commitments allowed, on weekends and holidays, or at home in my garden shed workshop during week evenings. Every hour of useful time I could cajole out of my day-to-day was allocated to doing some "boat work".

I don´t keep an accurate tally - no point in that - but I estimate I invested in new equipment, upgrades, and additional capability for Nausikaä about 150% of the original purchase price. This up to August 2019 and excluding the estimated value of my labour. If I were to compute the cost of opportunity of not putting those hours to my professional advantage, the overall cost of Nausikaä's refit would exceed the purchase price by an order of magnitude.

Ye Who Enter…

Let this be a warning to anyone contemplating doing the same thing and thinking it will be quick or easy. Abandon all hope because nothing less than that will do. Blinkers will be an absolute necessity to complete the task. If you can find them on Amazon, buy them! Blinkers to block out distractions, remove from view any other pursuits, shed from the disposable income budget any items which do not directly promote, assist, or conduce to the goal of getting your cruel mistress fit and sexy. The gazebo in the garden where you hoped to have barbeques with your friends this summer will go unbuilt, I promise you. The scuba diving holidays in the Red Sea will be forsaken. The weekly nights out will become monthly or cease altogether. The contents of your wine cellar will abruptly stop growing.

Tunnel vision and an all-absorbing, obsessive focus on a single outcome, is what it takes. That, and the ability to maintain a clear image of the goalposts in your mind, clear and emotionally compelling, to provide the drive. Therein lays the danger, you see. The whole thing becomes a positive feedback loop, a hole in the ground where you find yourself one day and realise the only way out is to continue digging until you get to China, because if you don´t, what else have you got?

If you are not prepared or able to do this, if your life is string-attached to multiple external demands and commitments, don´t even start down this path. Like the camera lens trick in the movies, where the sides of the image rush by you while the centre does not appear to move an inch, it will seem that no matter how much effort you put in, how much partial progress you make here and there, the breezy day on bottomless azure heading to that sunbathed and secluded cove never gets measurably closer. Instead, mile upon additional mile of drudge, sweat, and expense keeps appearing out of nowhere between you and that dream. You will be discouraged, loose hope, and give up halfway. It takes a particular kind of individual to do it, self-involved and without imagination or scruples, just like me. If you are not one of that sorry breed, if you still subscribe to an acceptable definition of normal, "balanced" life, look for another way. Or another dream.

Right. You´ve been forewarned! If you are not one of those, a boat owner, or intending to become one, you can cheerfully skip over the next section.

Other Major Upgrades and Inventory

Subsequently, and over a period of three years, the following additional major work was done in Nausikaä:

- ✓ **Engine replacement**. The old Volvo MD7A (12 HP) proved to be a dud. I sent it out for repair twice. It was temperamental to start, and unreliable running. Eventually, tired of having to cancel or abort outings with engine failure, and of feeding diesel mechanics' bottom lines, I decided to replace it with a Beta 16 HP. This Beta is the largest engine I could find that would fit in the GRP cradle on Nausikaä's engine compartment. Even so, I had to order the shallow sump version of the engine and shoehorn it in. Just bending the very, very stiff exhaust pipe to feed it through the existing holes took me one day!

  Changing the engine also meant replacing the muffler (the old one was corroded beyond repair), shaft, gland, and prop. The prop I replaced twice actually, as the first replacement, two-bladed as the original, was the wrong pitch for the TMC 40 gearbox of the Beta. I have now a three-blade which works fine and, as far as I have been able to notice, adds no additional drag under sail. **Cost of materials and install: just over 10,000 Sterling all together.**

  As an offset comment, the Beta proved a blessing. Cross fingers, but so far (about 600 hours operation to date) it has never failed to start on first contact, runs smoothly with little vibration, even with the engine pushed above 3000 RPM, and has given me cero trouble. All I had to do once in Brest was to replace the feet that were getting corroded. But I religiously service the engine myself according to the manufacturer´s schedule.

One battery bank under the port bunk in the cabin. There is another identical one under the starboard bunk.

- ✓ **Solar array**. The original electrical setup in Nausikaä included two 70 Ah car batteries, one for the engine, and one domestic. This was totally inadequate for my needs. It was already clearly inadequate for the boat

when I bought it, considering it had a compressor-driven fridge, and I was planning to run a considerable number of gadgets on the battery bank.

I built an electrical budget for the boat, and studied several setups: wind, solar, and combined. Eventually I settled for two independent solar arrays of two 100 W semi-rigid panels each, connected in parallel, and each with an independent MPPT controller. Alongside I installed four 110 Ah 12 V lead-acid batteries in two banks. This gives me over 450 W of power nominal. The semi-rigid monocrystalline panels are not the most efficient in the market but were my only choice. The single piece of real state large enough to accommodate 450 W worth of solar panels was the coach roof, and flexible panels were required to fit the concave roof surface. I can step on them if I must, and if I do it barefoot and gently.

I installed the controllers on the cabin forward bulkhead. As with the keel winch, they look a bit odd, but I wanted to be able to read charging levels off the controllers without having to lift



cushions and crouch inside storage compartments. This setup also minimises cable runs and consequently voltage drops. **Total cost of materials: 1,200 Pounds.**

For those that may be interested in the technicalities of this install, details are documented here: Illustrated Guide to Solar Installations on Boats - Page 10 - Cruisers & Sailing Forums (cruisersforum.com)

The install of the solar arrays required re-directing the running rigging, all of which – except the mizzen sheet- run over the cabin roof. I will describe the changes I made to the rig a bit later in this doc.

- ✓ **Ground tackle**: Replaced the old CQR anchor for a 15 kg Rocna. This is one size larger than recommended for the length of the boat and, so far, it has never dragged or failed to dig in. Together with the main anchor I also replaced 100 m of nylon rode and purchased a secondary Danforth (used) with 50 m of rode which I keep in the port lazarette in the cockpit. **Total cost: 750 Pounds.**

- ✓ **Electrics and Electronics**: This is a very wide category, so will subdivide in:

    - **Electrics**. I rewired the whole boat with tinned-cored, rubber-sheathed cable, installed several additional switch panels, fuse boxes and breakers, replaced all filament bulbs with LED inside and outside, and replaced all nav lights.

    - **Instruments and Networking**: I enabled a NMEA 0183 network onboard to interconnect the instruments through a multiplexer. The boat came with a Raymarine ST40 Tridata, a Garmin 128 GPS, and an Autohelm 4000 autopilot. All were very old, but since they were serviceable, I wanted to keep them as backups, and they would only accept 0183 message packaging. Additional investment was made replacing the Raymarine wind for a

NASA instrument, installing a WiFi-enabled QK A026 AIS receiver (also with its own GPS antenna) as a redundancy measure for the AIS on the VHF unit, and purchasing two navigation computers: a GPS-enabled tablet running Navionics as a portable backup electronic navigation devise, and a Panasonic Toughbook (weatherproof laptop computer) running Windows with OpenCPN. It is on the Toughbook where I do most of my navigation planning.

Later, I also purchased and installed a B&G Vulcan 10 multidisplay chartplotter and broadband radar. The radar is mounted on a pole at the stern, supported by a big SS bracket the rigger Tim built for me. The B&G kit is probably the best thing I ever bought for the boat, and definitely worth the comparatively high purchase price.

- **Telecomms**: This category includes a very nice Standard Horizon VHF with AIS capability and independent GPS antenna, as well as two short range hand-held marine radios. It also necessitated replacing the antenna at the top of the main mast, and the antenna cables running inside the mast and through to the unit.

  Total material cost of this overall category: I don´t know exactly, around 6,000 Pounds.

- ✓ **Tooling, Spares, and ancillary gear**: everything, from battery operated multitools to shift spanners, screwdriver sets, saw blades, soldering kit, hand fuel pump and jerry cans, bosun chair, one hundred different categories of consumables, engine spares, etc. The lot weights about 80 kg in total and occupies two thirds of the storage available under the starboard bunk in the cabin. **Total cost of materials: no idea but would not be surprised if it runs close to three thousand quid to date.**

- ✓ **Dingy and outboard:** smallest Seago dinghy I could find and a second-hand Suzuki 2.5, folding anchor and line. **Total cost: 1,100 Pounds.**

- ✓ **Safety and Security:** This includes the EPBIR, three life jackets, MOB kit and danbuoy, harness (for me, I don´t wear a lifejacket), binoculars, and other bits and pieces. **Total cost: about 1200 Pounds all told.**

- ✓ **Windvane:** Now, this is an interesting little item! And one that required months of R&D and build. The idea of installing a windvane became a “necessity” when the old Autohelm 4000 kept failing (something wrong with the fluxgate compass), which was a pity, since it is a no-frills, does-what-it-says-on-the-tin piece of gear. [Because I love it so much, I have since replaced it with another second-hand unit. Exactly the same model]. Having some kind of automatic steering capability is a must when sailing solo.

  For over a year, on and off, I researched the available commercial options, all very good (if mostly very bulky), and none quite suitable. The reason being Nausikaä’s huge barn-door, transom-hanged rudder which protrudes over two feet from the stern of the boat. Such a rudder is not suitable to support a trim tab system without extensive modification to the rudder, and the arch of turn of the rudder is so wide that the install of an auxiliary rudder windvane would have to be done so off-centre as to become ineffective when tacking on the opposite side.

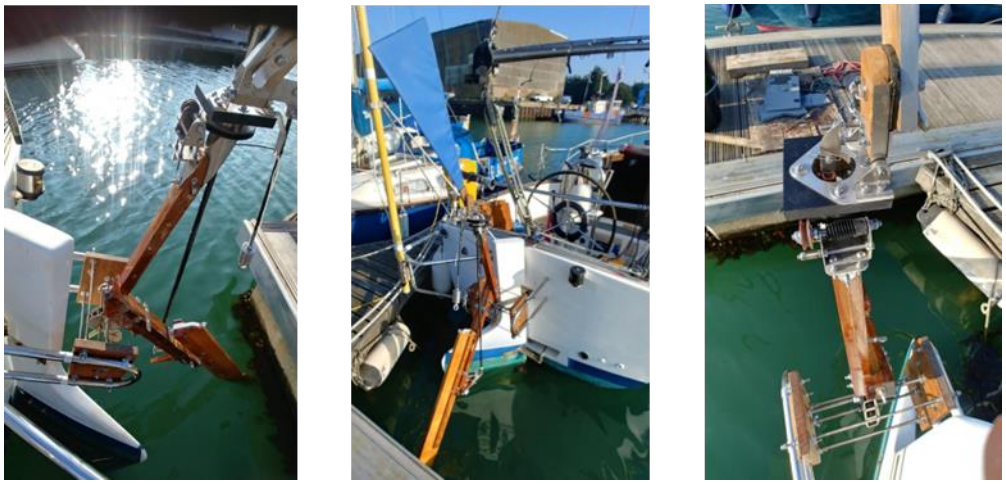
  In addition, Nausikaä has wheel steering, so any windvane would have to be powerful enough to comfortably overcome the friction of the gear-and-rod steering mechanism.

By sheer luck (I decided going there on a whim) I met John Flemming at the Southampton Boat Show. John is the designer of the *Hebridean*, a servo-pendulum windvane that seemed to fit my boat, and at the Show, John demonstrated to me the operation of the windvane.

This is a servo system. The vane itself picks the signal from the wind and transmits it to a long oar trailing in the water at an angle. The oar picks up energy from the water flowing by it, amplifying the signal from the vane, and transmits it to a pendulum, which in turn moves the rudder through control lines.

John does not manufacture the vane but sells a Lego-style DIY metal kit and detailed blueprints and instructions to build one from hardwood.

Again, by luck, a few months earlier I had purchased three raw-sawn slabs of Indian teak. These were 24 mm thick, 60 cm wide, over 3 m long, and about 60 years old. They were sold to me at a very reasonable price by a student at the International Boat Building College in Lowestoft, from scrap left over from the school's old building projects. I bought this wood for the purpose of revamping some of the furniture in Nausikaä, perhaps replacing the teak side boards on the cockpit, or any trimming I needed to do above deck. Buying the same three slabs of seasoned teak (even if I could find it!) at today´s commercial prices would represent thousands of Pounds of investment. It costed me a few hundred. And once the softwood was trimmed off the hardcore, I still had a decent set of timber to work with.



The Hebridean windvane

To build the vane, I had to do some retooling of my garden shed workshop. Up to then I had not done any more sophisticated carpentry than building a slab garden shed. Building this gadget however demanded tolerances of less than a millimetre, so precise medium-duty tools were required to cut and drill. It was not particularly difficult to build, and the instruction manual John provides is clear, it just required lots and lots of patience, fiddly adjustments, and attention to detail.

The support bracket and friction pinion for the vane were fashioned from off-the-shelf stuff bought on the web and repurposed to a greater or lesser extent, so easy to replace if bent of broken. In fact, the philosophy of the whole project, both vane and mounting frame, was to have something that, in case of accidental breakage or wear-and-tear, could be replaced with ease anywhere in the world, and with minimum access to tools and/or workshop. The only components which, if broken, need to be replaced from origin (rather than fixed) are the black nylon bits in the adjusting mechanism of the vane's turret. Everything else can made by cutting, bending, and drilling SS sheet material, or with timber the right size. **Total cost (vane kit, blueprints and licence to build, retooling of workshop, plus timber and consumables): 900 Pounds.**

For those interested, info on the Hebridean can be found here:
http://www.windvaneselfsteering.co.uk/index.html

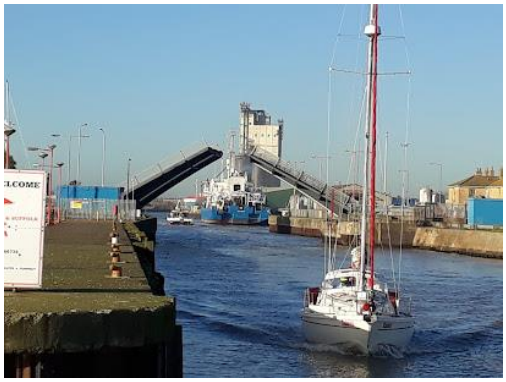
Of all the large expenditure items (well… large for my budget that is!) this is the one I got the least practical benefit from so far. It is not because it does not work. On the contrary! On trials, and in the few occasions when conditions allowed its use, it worked a charm on most points of sail and once the sails were balanced.

The practicality of its use however depends on the kind of sailing one does, and on wind and sea conditions. To operate efficiently the vane requires over 10 knots of apparent breeze steady in speed and direction.

I have done mostly coastal sailing since I bought the boat, where winds are not steady in neither speed nor direction. In these circumstances, adjustments in sail trim are required regularly and frequently, so sails need to be balanced repeatedly, the course corrected, and the vane itself reset every time. It is an involved process that takes up to 15 minutes to do. For shortish trips here in the Med, I´ve found that to brew a cuppa, eat, take a leak, rest during the day, and sleep for an hour at a time on a night passage, the autopilot works just fine at the touch of a button, and I have the amperes to feed it.

I will get the juice out of all the effort I´ve put into building the windvane when I decide to sail the trades across the Atlantic!

THE NORTH SEA

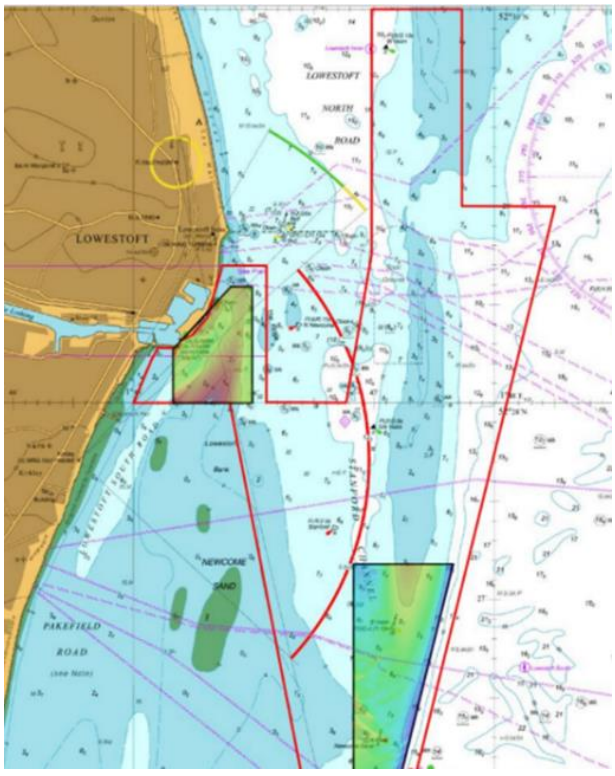


Entrance to Lowestoft harbour with the drawbridge in the background

Cold, windy, choppy, greenish-brown, thoroughly unwelcoming. That´s how I described it earlier around Lowestoft. Nothing like any sea I have known before. Even the muddy and shallow River Plate has cheerful, spirit-lifting moments along the course of the seasons. The North Sea moods shift from obdurate to dyspeptic to wrathful. Never a cadencious, rhythmic pulse to it, always an epileptic fit of several concurrent swell trains at odds with each other.

My first proper cruise on the North Sea was a week-end trip from Lowestoft to the Deben River with Max, a friend and neighbour from the yard. About 40 NM as the crow flies. Of course, I had been out on many occasions, on my own and with other people, but always as a pleasure day outing, or for a few hours to test the equipment or practice manoeuvres, and always in the vicinity of Lowestoft, within sight of the harbour entrance and straying from the approach channel marker buoys only to get clear of the mud banks. This was my first overnight proper cruise on Nausikaä.

On this occasion we had joined the Deben outing as guests of the Norfolk & Suffolk Royal Yacht Club Cruising Group. Oh yes… the whole mouthful of it! Max and I attended the briefing the evening before departure together with about fifteen other people. Most participants were motorboats, but there were to be also two other sailing boats in the flotilla apart from Nausikaä, with a grand total of eight craft participating. As the sailing boats were the slowest and had to mind the tidal currents, the plan called for an early departure from Lowestoft for us, at the turn of the tide. All sailboats were to assemble upstream of the Lowestoft drawbridge at 04:00 and make our way south hugging the shore. The motorboats would leave later in the morning and catchup with us in the approaches to the Deben. Once in the river, we were all to proceed another five miles upstream to the Woodbridge marina.



Approaches to Lowestoft. The highlighted areas indicate where bathymetric surveys are carried out twice yearly. The mud banks shift position every season.

Despite the apparent simplicity of the passage, careful navigation and adherence to schedules

was required. The Deben River is barred by a shifting shallow sand bank, only accessible for a couple of hours either side of HWS. Moreover, the Woodbridge marina has a concrete sill to keep the water in at low tide. This means we also had to make speedy progress upriver for six miles against the current to get into the marina with sufficient draft over the sill. Failure to keep to the timetable meant having to divert to Harwich, eight miles down the coast, in case of not making the river mouth, or having to set the hook on the river channel outside Woodbridge in case of not making the marina´s sill.

Either alternative was utterly unthinkable to Max and me. We were the newbies in that ensemble. We were also "upstreamers" and had to demonstrate our sailing credentials proving beyond doubt we were as salty a herring as the best of them.

That morning I got up in the wee hours to have breakfast, make a pot of coffee for the ride, and have a last walk around deck to make sure everything was ready. Max joined me at 03:45 to help with casting off.

We made it to the drawbridge to find we were the only boat going out at that time. What happened to the other two sailboats that were supposed to come along?

Six hours later on the approaches to Deben, where everyone was supposed to meet up, we found the same thing, i.e. nothing. Not a soul to be seen. This was disconcerting! I had never been there and was counting on other more experienced boaters that had to show me the way through the sand bank and into the narrow river mouth.

We could not tarry as the tide was about to turn, so we pushed through upriver laboriously against the current, and made it to Woodbridge a little after lunch. At the marina we found the organiser of the cruise in his boat, and no-one else from the N&SRYC. Eight crafts had become two!

UPSTREAM & DOWNSTREAM

Lowestoft is a place with a long history of seafaring and many observed rancid traditions. The history is undeniable. It was a main point of entry into East Anglia during the Saxon migrations of the VI and VII centuries and Viking raids in the IX century, an important ship building and industrial harbour since the XVII century, and a fishing harbour since hook and net were invented.

Today there is no industry to speak of in Lowestoft, and the North Sea herring has been fished to extinction. The harbour is kept economically alive by a small number of operators providing maintenance and ancillary services to the offshore windfarms. Once a year, with luck, one of the big North Sea gas platforms is towed in for repairs or decommissioning.

There are also three pleasure boat marinas in Lowestoft. There is the N&S Royal Yacht Club, with its own berthing facilities. There is a two-year waiting list for a berth and you´ve got to be a member. Then there is the Cruising Club, a tight-knit and secretive bunch. Membership by invitation only, and only if you can buy your berth. Then there is the Haven Marina, a large commercial operation. Beside these three, there are another four very small berthing sites, mostly attached to commercial yards as a business sideline, Paul Sheader´s place, where I was, being one of these.

Now, there is a very clear demarcation line in the Lowestoft drawbridge, which separates geographically and socially. The N&SRYC is between the bridge and the harbour wall. This is "Downstream". Everybody else east of the drawbridge is "Upstream". And upstream is the wrong side of the tracks. To the downstreamers, the upstream blokes are the newcomers, the upstarts that don´t pay homage to tradition, that don´t wear a jacket to dinner, the ones that don't give a fig that their club was visited by HRH Joe Bloggs in 1906.

Never mind that the upstreamers are the ones that actually do the vast majority of sailing for pleasure in and out of Lowestoft harbour. They are just not like "us", upper-salty-crust sea dogs.

And they are most definitely not allowed at the club´s members bar!

Oh well…. And these are the downstream salty sea dogs?!

That weekend afforded me a priceless opportunity, a visit to Sutton Hoo. After checking in at the marina office, Max declared that he was not interested in the past, preferring instead to explore the Woodbridge pubs, so I took a cab from Woodbridge for the short ride to the Sutton Hoo archaeological site.

In 1938, a private excavation on suspected Viking era burials uncovered an early Saxon ship burial with an extraordinary treasure in artefacts and jewels. Most of the finds are now housed at the British Museum, but the site´s exhibition rooms contain realistic replicas, and the excavation site itself is fascinating to explore. That visit alone was worth the trip!

Enjoying a well-earned pint in Woodbridge. Picture by Max.

The following day, a Sunday, we were heading back to Lowestoft. HW was at 11:00 and the weather report promised us similar conditions as the day before, light easterlies and a clear sky. We would be close hauled all the way to Lowestoft but on that angle, I expected we could still make good progress under sail on a single tack. It would still be against the tide though.

What we found once out of the river mouth was not a light easterly breeze, but an 18 knot NNE, right on the nose! The bathymetry in that part of the coast is challenging. A string of narrow, long, shallow (0.5 m shallow, drying up at LWS shallow) mud banks lie parallel to the shore between Deben and Lowestoft, with an 8-10 m deep channel in between. Now the channel itself is no more than a few of hundred meters wide on the narrowest gap, less than a mile on average, so not a lot of room to tack upwind at 40 degrees, and the mud banks throw up a devilish steep chop with a three to four second period on the lee.

Max and I discussed our options. We could go offshore past the mud banks and tack at leisure. However, this would add another 12 miles or so to the overall distance to Lowestoft and place us in the fastest running tidal stream in the opposite direction.

Neither of us fancied the prospect of spending several more hours than strictly necessary in that washing machine. Nausikaä was fighting the chop like a bronco in a rodeo. In the end we decided to bite the bullet, stick to the plan, and keep to the inside route, so I abated all sail and we resigned to motoring the entire way home. To minimise windage -since we were motoring- I also pulled down the dodger. That was a mistake!

At about 17:00 we were within sight of the Southwold lighthouse, about two fifths of the way to Lowestoft. It started raining then. The following four hours, at dusk and well into the night, I spent in forlorn contemplation of the Southwold lighthouse nailed fast on the same bearing to port, despite doing 5 knots SOW, 0 or negative SOG.

A rather jerky, cold, wet, and thoroughly uncomfortable ride! We arrived in Lowestoft past 01:00 the following day. A passage that should have taken us eight to nine hours to complete, took us fourteen! The drawbridge operator in Lowestoft did us the mercy of an unscheduled bridge opening, and Max and I moored at the yard 30 mins later, just to say good night to each other and crash, utterly exhausted, in our bunks.

Crossing the North Sea

From Lowestoft in a straight line its 115 NM to IJmuiden in Holland. For pleasure craft the crossing is relatively straight forward until you get past halfway to the Dutch coast. There are two main traffic separation zones, the northern one along the Frisian islands, the southern one on the approaches to Hook of Holland and Rotterdam. The recommended route is to squeeze between the separation zones to the coast, and then sail north or south close inshore, away from the main traffic. But close inshore there are also a multitude of shifting mud banks and many windfarms, so close attention to the plotter and your depth gauge are required.

I planned the crossing with Adrian, my next-door neighbour in Bracknell, an experienced competitive sailor, over a weekend. This amount of time was enough to get there and get back on the following tide, but just, if we were lucky. I could afford to spend more time touring the Dutch canals, but Adrian had to be back in the office 09:00 on Monday.

On our way to IJmuiden

The crossing was to be made over neap tides to minimise the effect of the NE-SW tidal streams on the Dutch coast. Even so, when plotting the course, we accounted for an average of 3 knots tidal current drift in both directions, which added about 15 NM to the straight-line distance between Lowestoft and IJmuiden. The reciprocal course was not symmetrical because the tides do not run in the same direction with the same speed on both sides of the North Sea. Apart from that, the only major charted obstacle on our way were the Rijs Field platforms, a little south of our route, and the extensive windfarms close inshore between Hoek van Holland and Den Helder.

One of the reasons for making the trip was to put the sails, and the rig in general, fully to test in open water conditions. Since buying the boat I had been dissatisfied with Nausikaä's performance, the wrap-around sails, and the way the rig was set up. I tried different configurations on my own without meaningful improvement. On this occasion I wanted Adrian's opinion. Maybe, probably, I was doing things wrong, and wanted the opportunity to learn from him.

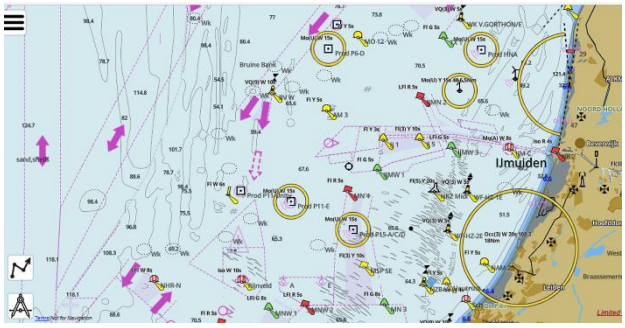
We left Lowestoft early afternoon on a Friday, on a compass course of 98 degrees, with an ominous overcast sky and a northerly blowing at 12 knots. Adrian suggested we run only with the main for a while, without the mizzen. He was also new to the rig and wanted to know how the boat behaved and what the relative contribution of either sail was in terms of power and balance. I had never done that. In fact, everything I had read about Freedom rigs said it should not be done. OK, let´s see. It will be a good experiment.

In the early evening the wind went down to 8 knots and we were doing between 2.5 and 3 knots SOW with the main alone, so we hoisted the mizzen. With a full head of sail, 8 knots and a 0.5 m

swell on the beam, we were hovering just below 4 knots SOW on average. Not too bad, not particularly good either.

The night sail was uneventful, with steady northerlies at 10 knots the whole time and good viz. The sky was still covered, so it was very dark, no stars or moon, but lots of lights on the eastern horizon, where the continental traffic separation zone is. We also had a couple of other sailing boats within sight on roughly the same course, their navigation lights clearly visible.

Adrian and I made watches of two hours. It was my first night underway in open waters and I was too excited to fall into a deep slumber anyway, so catnaps would probably be the best I could muster that night.



Approaches to IJmuiden

By daybreak we were 32 miles from IJmuiden. The tide had turned, and we were now drifting north into the traffic separation zone. The wind also dropped to nothing, so we started the engine and revved for 4.5 knots. We had the Rijn platforms clearly visible to starboard, and lots of traffic around us. I never counted less than ten targets on the AIS within a 5-mile radio. The other sailing boats that accompanied us during the night had disappeared from view.

Some anxious moments there. The AIS CPA alarm, which I had set for 3 miles, kept on going off every few minutes. Since we had good viz and mild sea conditions, I reduced the range to 1 mile. Still, some of the targets, large container ships and ferries, moved very fast, so both Adrian and I had to keep a sharp watch, binoculars in hand all the time, for the remainder of the way to IJmuiden.

We came into the approach channel to IJmuiden unhurried by anyone and moored on the waiting pontoon at the Seaport Marina at 14.30. We had made the 120 NM crossing without incident and in 21 hours. With the considerable help of the tide, of course.

The Seaport Marina waiting pontoon is where everyone cools his heels waiting for the dike gates to open into the Noordzeekanaal that will take them into Amsterdam, and the Markermeer and Ijsselmeer beyond.

Unfortunately, we did not have the time to take advantage of Dutch hospitality. We had a few hours to eat, catch a nap, and would be off again on the following tide.

There is a very nice bistro in IJmuiden, the *Zilt aan Zee*, on the beachfront and close to the entrance to the marina docks. Adrian and I sat down on the terrace, thirsty for Dutch beer, and pretty much starved. We had had nothing but soggy sandwiches, dried fruits and nuts, biscuits and Mars bars for the previous 24 hours.

We also needed to discuss the passage back. Digging into two substantial bowls of *erwtensoep* and a bottle or three of Grolsch, we reviewed the situation. The planned route back was taking us in a W-NW direction from IJmuiden, taking into account the tide drift. But that was with a good breeze on the beam and averaging 5 knots SOG. Both the BBC and the Dutch Weather Service forecasted northerlies at 5 knots for the following 12 hours, increasing to 10 knots on the English side the following morning. Adrian shook his head. *That means nothing* he said. *Five knots forecasted could be ten or could be nothing at all with equal probability. Not reliable!*

The following ebb tide was at 19:00. If we were to make the tide, we had less than three hours to eat, catch a 30 mins nap, do a safety walk around the deck, and be on our way.

We looked at each other and thought the same thing. The anticipation of crossing the TSZ with the level of traffic we encountered on the way in, in the dark, going slowly on the engine, and tired as we already were, did not appeal to either of us.

I had ample time and no problem with staying until whenever, but Adrian had to be at work in the office Monday morning. In the end, Adrian decided to skive on Monday morning. He would sort it out with his boss later! We both breathed a sigh of relief and tucked into our *appeltaart* with gusto. We would leave on Sunday´s early morning tide and could get a good rest that night.

The Issues with the Rig

A couple of weeks later, I queried Adrian on his opinion of Nausikaä's rig. He took his time in responding. He liked the rig overall. It was easy to control, simple, responsive, and evidently appropriate to the vessel. He disliked the wrap-around sails. Adrian said they were "ugly" and he was not referring to aesthetics. In essence, Adrian´s opinion confirmed mine. The sails were old and had stretched, considerably in some parts, making it nay impossible to achieve a good shape. Too much twist at the top, wrinkles at the foot, not possible to tighten the leech, difficult to reef. And ugly. Adrian also thought the boat was underpowered, particularly in light airs, and would improve significantly with new, better-cut sails.

Two other peculiarities of this boat also became apparent during this trip. Firstly, Nausikaä is like a cat. She will not take you where you want her to go to, she will take you where she can sail comfortable to. This sounds moronic, but it isn´t when you are behind the wheel, and it´s of fundamental importance when planning a route. The lesson is: find her groove and she will sail surefooted, comfortably, and surprisingly fast. Get the wind and/or the swell where she does not like it, and she will dig her heels and give you a jerky, stomach churning ride.

Secondly, although the main and mizzen sails are of nearly equal size, the main is the tractor sail. The mizzen helps with traction, but not in direct proportion to its size, and mostly provides balance. Sailing with the main only, the boat has considerable weather helm. This was to be expected as the main mast is right at the bow of the boat. With both sails fully up, Nausikaä retains some weather helm with the wind ahead of the beam. This is good, I though. If I fall overboard, the boat will come into the wind on its own and stop in irons within a couple of minutes. With the wind behind the beam, it will depend on the angle of the wind and the swell in each specific scenario.

In summary, it was clear to me Nausikaä would always need a light hand on the wheel. Not the kind of boat that would naturally keep a steady course with balanced sails. More an Alfa Romeo than a BMW she is. This being the case, the need for automatic steering, wind-driven or electric, became more apparent when sailing solo. I made a mental note of this.

The passage back was again uneventful, and for the most part relaxed. We left IJmuiden at 06:00 on Sunday, just before the turn of the tide, crossed the TSZ with daylight, and made it back to Lowestoft on Monday morning at 10:00. According to plan, considering the route back was longer by 20 miles.

The only noteworthy event on passage happened during the night, on my watch, about 60 NMs from the English coast. I had the 02-04 watch. Cloudy skies, dark, 8 knots of wind on the starboard beam, moderate swell, the only lights on the horizon were behind me, so all good and normal.

For some reason, and to this day I don´t know what that reason was, I decided to switch on the radar, not expecting to see anything, really! But as soon as started, the radar threw a large target less than half a mile in front of me. Very dense, bright red colour on the screen, and judging from the size on the screen, maybe 50 meters long or more. I had good viz and I still could not make anything ahead of the bow, no lights, nothing. Nothing on the AIS either. The first panicky thought that crossed my mind was: *floating containers adrift!* The target was not steady, it appeared and disappeared from the screen, but when it did appear it was big, moving rapidly south across my bow. I went below and woke Adrian to come up and have a look. He was not a happy bunny; he had just fallen asleep! Ten minutes later when he managed to get on the cockpit, the target had disappeared for good.

I don´t know what Adrian thought of me at the time, but he never sailed with me again. Perhaps because of the sails, perhaps because of me. Maybe both!

Months later, Paul Sheader gave me the only plausible identity for that target I ever had. He said it was likely a submarine. Paul had been a RN sub engineer. He obviously knew things I didn't.

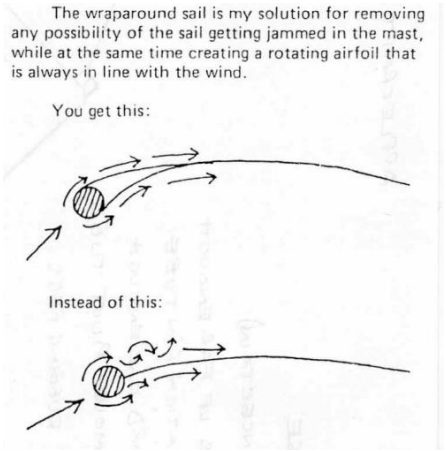
UNWIELDY RIG

Of all the design features of the boat, the rig was what took me the longest to come to terms with and learn to use effectively. There were ropes that appeared to fulfil no practical purpose or be rigged in a way that acted in opposition to each other. The overall initial impression was that there were just too many moving pieces, too many variables in the equation.

Nausikaä came with a wardrobe of main, mizzen, and a light-airs staysail. The main and mizzen were the original sails the boat was first sold with, three owners and thirty years before me, i.e. “double ply” sails that wrapped around the masts, fastened together with strings through small grommets on the leech. The sails were very large, with very little roach, and with small leech battens. The sails were made of medium gauge polyester, were -evidently- old, but appeared to be in serviceable condition. However, it was clear to me even then that the need for new sails was not far off in Nausikaä’s future.

The double-ply construction of the sails seemed the oddest element of the overall rig. Freedom Boats technical documentation explained the design as a solution to eliminate wind detachment from the sail caused by the vortex generated behind the thick carbon fibre mast.

In paper, it seemed an elegant and effective solution. The masts ***are*** very thick, and probably produce lots of turbulent air flow behind them.



Eexcerpt from the "Freedom 35 Rigging and Sailing Guide" document by Freedom Boats.

To my sceptical mind however and thinking forward to the day when I may have to get new sails made, it seemed a bit of an overkill for a rig and a vessel which, by design, was unlikely to benefit meaningfully from such fine aerodynamic sophistication. Would the performance improvement allegedly brough about by this design be worth the expense of each sail consuming ***double*** the square footage of expensive fabric to build?

On the first few outings I did on my own, on relatively quiet days just off Lowestoft, to test the rig and practice basic manoeuvres, the disadvantages of this design started to become apparent. Hoisting the sails was a laborious endeavour and abating them even more so on my own, the wrap around sails sticking to the mast, particularly when wet. Furthermore, achieving a decent sail trim with a reef on them seemed to be beyond my ability. When abated, the sail formed concertina-like folds above the wishbone boom choke; same when reefed. On the first reef it was not too bad, but on the second reef, I ended up with what looked like the contents of my laundry basket wrapped around the mast 2 meters up, tension creases on the sail everywhere, and the reefing lines tight as bow strings.

It was evident I was doing something wrong. There had to be an easier way, a right way to set and trim these sails under most conditions. I put these difficulties down to my ignorance and lack of

experience of how to operate this rig, and admonished myself to be patient, persevere, and learn to sail my revolutionary design boat! And I did. Persevere I mean. Over the following months I tried to hoist, abate, and reef, with different tensions on the outhaul and the sheet, with different angles of the boom, and at different angles to the wind. Some combinations of those factors made the manoeuvre slightly better than others, but I never managed to work out a setting and a sequence of actions that would make the whole manoeuvre quick and easy.

Now, the "easy" part of this was supposed to be, from the very beginning, a fundamental attribute of this rig, and a main reason why I chose it over a traditional Bermudian rig. Two critical issues kept making it complicated. Firstly, no matter the settings or conditions, I very seldom managed to execute a manoeuvre without having to leave the cockpit and go forward, either to bring the sail down by hand to reef or abate completely, to pull or ease a line at the mast, or to disentangle something. Secondly, most running lines seemed to require an awful lot of tension, impossible to apply without a winch, and there was only one of those in the whole boat. It was more than simply aspirational that I may be able to do everything that was required to hoist, abate, and trim the sails from the cockpit. This was a must when sailing on my own.

Over this trialling period with the sails, I came to two main conclusions. Firstly, my trial methodology was correct. In other words, the reason why I could not get the sails to hang "properly" was not my clumsiness or ignorance. There was something inherently wrong with the whole setup. Pfffew! It was not ***me***.

Secondly, I really needed new sails. The sails showed considerable stretch, making it very difficult to achieve a clean aerofoil surface. Adrian´s word to describe them was "ugly". The frock just didn´t fit the dummy anymore! Furthermore, during the Journey across the North Sea it became obvious that on moderate breezes the boat was underpowered with the wind ahead of the beam, hopelessly so close hauled to a light (say below 10 knots) breeze.

So… new sails it is! The thought was a dread in terms of the foreseeable expense, but also a great emotional relief. All the frustration of the previous months was vindicated at once and forever.

Aerodynamics 101

With some trepidation, I realised I was going to be breaking new ground here in several respects. Up to then, all the modifications and upgrades I had made in Nausikaä had not modified in any way the basic geometry of the vessel nor its sailing characteristics. Fiddling around with the sails was a different matter altogether as inadequate sails could not only worsen the situation but also make the boat unsafe.

All I had clear in my mind was what I ***did not*** want. I did not want wrap-around-the-mast, double-ply sails, no matter how many advantages they were proclaimed to have in paper. But knowing what you don´t want is not a good place from which to figure out what you do want.

It became clear I had to do some R&D to come up with a solution. Well, I had all winter to do it. Next season I wanted to have Nausikaä nicely dressed up and turning eyes at the party!

Many Hoyt-design Freedoms have been converted over the years to a battcar and track system, and the double ply sails replaced with conventional sails, and there is a lot of useful information available in the public domain about how to do this. Much of this info is in Freedomyachts.org, the Freedom owners´ website, but there are also contributions from famed naval architects such as Eric Sponberg, who designed and documented such conversions.

After reading all opinions and instructions on the topic I could find, I remained unconvinced about the battcar and track system. On the one hand, an aluminium track with a straight and even cross-section had to be retrofitted to a carbon fibre tube of uneven (tapering) profile. Furthermore, the rigid track had to be rivetted to a somewhat flexible substrate. Intra-laminar damage of the carbon fibre around the rivet holes was a documented problem. Most opinions pointed out that this was a professional´s job, best done by a specialist yard and, to my knowledge, none of those existed in the UK. On the other hand, although the wrap-around sails may have been an ineffective solution to the aerodynamic problem of wind detachment behind the mast, a fixed track on the mast could only exacerbate the problem, not solve it.

My intuition (I am not an engineer!) suggested that the solution for Nausikaä could lie between these two concepts, with the sail attached to the mast in a way that it could pivot around it and maintain the alignment of the luff with the wind direction (hence maintaining a constant angle of attack of the aerofoil and minimising the vortex created behind the mast), and at the same time, be easy to hoist, abate, and reef.

Then there was the problem of what kind of sails to get. Anything I ordered from a sailmaker had to be a bespoke job, as there were no standard models and cuts for nineteen-eighties Freedoms. Most sailmakers in the UK could reproduce and fine-tune a particular design, but I had to come up with it first.

Back to the classroom and to re-learning the principles of physics that make a wing want to fly, and a sail to propel a boat forward. During this period of R&D two things happened: I learned of Gio Schouten, and I came to be in correspondence with Eric Sponberg in the US.

Sail lashing technique in a Dutch sailing barge.

Let´s start with Eric. Eric is a famed naval architect, and an innovator in all things related to unstayed mast rigs and the use of carbon fibre spars.

I had made a few postings about my rig blues on **Boatdesign.net**, an online naval architect forum, hoping for a charitable soul in that community to guide me through this process with some hard-core engineering science advice. Eric replied to my posts and was kind enough to forward me the blueprints of a design he had made for the same conversion on a Freedom 40 CK. This conversion was done with a battcar and track system (which I didn´t want) but I shamelessly plagiarised Eric´s sail design and graphically scaled it down to Nausikaä's E, P, and Y measurements. This was a template I could give to a sailmaker to use for the three-dimensional design of Nausikaä's sails.

Now to Gio. Gio Schouten is a dutchman who owned a Freedom 35 CK a few years back. When the time came for Gio to replace the sails on his boat, like me he did not want double-ply wrap-around sails, so came up with the "G10 rig", a blend of modern and traditional design features. Gio´s sails were fully battened, fairly roachy, and attached to the mast with a lashing line and wooden bead parrels, as found even today in Dutch traditional sailing barges. The G10 rig was subsequently adopted by several Freedom owners.

In paper, the G10 rig solved many of my problems, but what appealed to me the most was that it was a tried and tested, low-tech arrangement. Nothing in it, literally, that could not be done with rope, block, and shackle.

So… I had the basic sail design from Eric, and an easy way to attach sail to the mast from Gio. All I had to do now was to get the sails made.

Bumpy Road

That was another journey! I prepared a brief and contacted four sailmakers: Northsails, Ullman, Jeckels, and HK Sailmakers in Hong Kong, China. Northsails and Ullman I had lengthy discussions with at their stand on the Southampton Boat show. Jeckels was local to me, having their loft in Wroxham, less than 30 miles from Lowestoft. Honk Kong Sailmakers was the wildcard in the pack. I considered them because I read good reviews of their products and services, they were very competitive in terms of price, and they undertook to ship the sails to me in the UK free of charge.

After reviewing my brief, Northsails said they could not build what I wanted. Jeckels was not interested in taking up the job. Only Ullman and HK Sailmakers reverted with suggestions and a priced proposal. Of those two, HK Sailmakers offered me the best price, but also the longest lead time for delivery. Ulmann said they could complete the build in three months. This suited me fine as I was planning an extensive cruise around the south coast of England the following season. Plenty time to get the sails made and do the trials before June the following year, I thought. After considering all these factors, I decided to engage Ullman for the job, and paid them the agreed 50% of the total cost in advance for the design and construction of two new sails.

Three months my foot! It took Ullman one year to deliver! Twelve months of disappointment and frustration for me, and the plans for the main fixture of the 2018 sailing season cancelled.

During the winter that year I took the old sails out and brought them home with me. One mild Saturday afternoon in January, I spread them out on my back lawn and inspected them in detail. You know, their condition was not altogether hopeless! Yes, there was damage around the batten pockets and reef grommets, and quite visible stretching of the fabric around the luff, head, and clew. To be expected really, these were thirty-five years old sails, but my goodness... there was a lot of square footage of fabric in these double-ply sails! I wondered if something could be done with these sails that would tie me over while the new sails were being built.

I contacted John Iliffe, a local Cardiff sailmaker. John builds and repairs small craft sails on his loft in the hills north of Cardiff. I drove to Cardiff with the old sails so he could evaluate their condition and we could discuss the details. In essence, the job entailed cutting the old sails in two halves, head to tack, putting a new luff in one of the halves, and patching and repairing damaged sections and panels with the good fabric left over from the other half.

In the end John proved a blessing to me. Not only did he make new sails from the old ones, but I had the opportunity to have these made to fit the G10 rig, trial the rig and manoeuvres, and use the experience to fine-tune the design of the Ulmann sails. The sails John built are now my spare set, and they still bring me home when I have a problem with the others.

Gio´s documentation for the G10 rig was clear and informative, but rather sketchy on important detail. These gaps I had to bridge with imagination and inventiveness, and then test by trial and error. Gio used a strip of sown sail material to make a "*rakband*", a lacing line for the sail. I did not

Nausikaa´s sails attached with bead parrels.

have this, so I used a length of 25 mm wide polyester webbing instead. It worked but generated an awful lot of friction on the mast when hoisting the sail. I then replaced the webbing with bead parrels. I had seen these in traditional gaff-rigged barges in the Netherlands and the UK. Very old fashioned!

To make the parrels I spliced a length of Dyaneema on both ends (something not easy to do, believe me!) and spaced large resin jewellery beads in between. It also worked, somewhat, but the parrels tended to get tangled with each other over the boom choke when the sail was down, requiring me to go forward to the mast to disentangle when hoisting. They also left a very large gap between the luff of the sail and the mast.

Today, I use a mixture of the two systems. I have two bead parrels at the top of the sail, and another three on the section of the sail that falls below the boom choke, and I use a low-friction 8 mm nylon rope as a lacing line in between the parrels. This arrangement in almost tangle-free and allows me to control the gap between the luff of the sail and the mast by tightening the lacing line. It is an important detail. A few centimetres more or less of curvature on the luff changes considerably the three-dimensional shape of the aerofoil and with it, the overall efficiency of the sail. But of course, the only way to find out which arrangement worked best was by trial and error.

Boom chokes in the original Freedom rig

Nausikaa´s boom chokes made of polyester webbing.

The same happened with the design of the boom choke. I tried many different solutions: a stainless-steel ring with ball bearing rollers, three bead parrels tied together, and a choke made with wide webbing in different configurations. Here again, the best solutions turned out to be the lowest-tech, simpler one: A length of wide, stiff polyester webbing with one ss D ring on each end, lined on the inside with PFTE tape to reduce friction against the mast. Presto!

This boom choke (and the wishbone boom) of Freedom boats is designed to move up and down the mast, changing the angle at which the boom sits wrt the mast. In essence, the wishbone boom "floats" about in the air with the mast and the sail between its arms, and is held in position by the topping lift, the boom halliard, and the boom choke which is itself adjustable. The wishbone boom of other similar boats such as Nonsuch and Taunton is fixed at a given height, they don´t move up and down the mast on the forward side. This fixture of Freedom rigs is puzzling, and its function difficult to understand or appreciate at first, and even more difficult to learn to use.

It was for me at least. I learned to trim a sail on standard Bermudian sloops, i.e. rack up the mast to give the sail more camber and twist, loosen the back stay to tighten the leech and flatten the sail. Well, my masts are flexible anyway, and I don´t have a back stay! The angle of the boom on Freedoms boats helps in setting the camber by applying gravity-assisted tension on the clue at different angles, and together with the outhaul and the sheet, determine the three-dimensional shape of the sail. Learning how to use these three elements to fine-tune the sails' trim took me a while, and I am still learning.

All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Go

Finally, the big moment had arrived. The new sails were delivered! An employee of Ulmann came to Lowestoft to drop them off at the yard and show me how to set them up on the boat. And my goodness, they were gorgeous! Ulmann's customer service in my case had been atrocious, but the quality of their finished product was undoubtedly excellent: good design and superb workmanship.

Nausikaa with her new sails

Fully battened with external batten pockets, they hanged beautifully, like the wing of a Spitfire, and looked very powerful. I could not wait to go out of the river mouth and put them to the test. But of course, it was autumn by then, so there Nausikaä was, all dressed up and nowhere to go! Oh, there were still some outings to be had for sure, up to mid-October, on exceptionally good days. But there would be just that, an exception, and unpredictable oddity to the general cold, stormy, rainy greyness of the UK winters. The fun days in the sun at sea will have to wait until next year Rafa! Patience is a good thing.

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

It was 2018, the year when everything was supposed to happen. And it did happen alright!

It was the year when I did my last bit work as a payroll member of a corporation. It was the year when it became clear to anyone with eyes in their head and one finger of forehead that Brexit was really, really a very bad idea. There was some room for doubt before then, but there could be none after. It was the year when the wet, gloomy, six-month long UK winters finally got to me, after 21 years.

I´ve always been a goal-driven person, a bit like Ferdinand the Bull, that needs a red rag in front of his eyes to move at all. And when it does move, it charges! In my case, those goals are the physical sublimation of my dreams, the taste, smell, texture, and sound of those dreams in the real world, where I wake up every morning and go to sleep at night. I´m not alone in this, most goal-driven people are like that. My only claim to any degree of exceptionality is that I seem to undertake the pursuit of those goals with an obsessive focus and a dogged determination stubborn to the point of idiocy.

In a professional context, this characteristic might be considered an asset, but it is a liability, believe me, when applied as a methodology to lead a happy, balanced life. Not the least because there is no room in that equation for the necessary continuing evaluation of whether the goal will objectively usher the dream, or whether the dream remains relevant and worth pursuing in the changing and unpredictable world of one´s waking hours.

For what seemed like an eternity, I had subsumed most other interests and pursuits, not to mention investing all my disposable income, to the goal of turning my chamber pot with masts into a good sailing craft, and of becoming myself an acceptable sailor.

In that process most of the other goals, the landmarks and mileposts that up to then had served as positional references to pursue and steer my life in the UK for twenty years, seemed to have undergone mass extinction. Many of them had been achieved with acceptable success, it is true. Some, with failure. But still, just as many remained unachieved, and those unachieved ones had suddenly shed their relevance. I could no longer tell them apart, decide why they continued to be important, worthy of paying attention to, and of orienting myself by. They had become just a few more anthills in Ovamboland.

And all that in pursuit of an activity which, where I was, I could only come to realise to any meaningful satisfaction during six weeks in a year.

What the hell had happened? I sat down to dinner one evening at home, staring in silence at the paintings on the wall, and after three bites I dropped the fork, threw my arms up in the air and shouted: ***What the f*ck am I doing here!!***

It was not a midlife crisis. I had my fair share of those in the past. Those were crises, they passed. There was a different texture to this one, one of permanence and finality; An end-of-an-era, cul-de-sac feel to it.

I looked at the reality of my days and nights objectively, and realised I just could not find reasons good enough that justified why I was living the life I was living, in the place I was living it in.

Don´t laugh. It´s a kick in the teeth of a realisation for anyone!

I felt I had been cowardly cruising at economical speed on autopilot, and it was now time now to go looking for the wind. If squalls were found, then so be it, but chugging on autopilot was taking me nowhere.

There are at least two likely outcomes to posing the question in italics above. Outcome number one is to go back. To stop digging your hole in the ground, climb out by whatever means you can, and once out of it, take up your old patterns re-clothed with new meaning and purpose. This is a very sensible course of action.

Outcome number two, and by far the easier, is to go forward, but doing that requires to stop beating about the bush and accept, fully, intimately, ruthlessly, that whatever meaning and purpose you may find in life are the ones you yourself bestow upon it as you go along. The responsibility is entirely yours! Antonio Machado already said it with superb artistry: *Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.*

Well, good… great! When you´ve been staring at your own belly button for a long time and then lift your eyes, the horizon looks very wide indeed, and the sunshine is blinding!

It is sunshine that you are craving mate? Lots of it below the 40th Parallel! Is it adrenalin and adventure? Well, you have Nausikaä. What do you want, the Starship Enterprise? Is it transcendent meaning to your life? Make up your mind!

Yes! the answer came back. *All those and more!*

By the end of dinner, with extraordinary lucidity and surprising calmness, I had made up my mind to quit my corporate job, move countries, and go for a long, long sailing cruise, one of those without an expiry date. All I had to do now was to sort out the logistics and combine all three of those things into one plan.

Yeah…right!

The snag in the plan was that I did not feel assured Nausikaä or I were fit for the task I had just set us both to and would measure up to the grand vision. Leave aside the weakest link in the chain for a moment, i.e. ***me***. Nausikaä had come to my hands as a sure-footed little boat, that I could make comfy for one or two people to hop along between the shallow rivers and harbours of the east and south coasts of England. When buying the boat, the longest journey I envisaged was across the North Sea to Holland and Belgium or, at a stretch of imagination, Normandy and the Channel Islands. Quite suddenly however, the world had become huge, and all my charts ended short of most potential destinations.

Of course, the boat was not ***the*** problem. With comparatively minor effort and investment additional to that already done, she could be equipped and enabled for longer (up to about 20 days at sea long) voyages, and for the open ocean in reasonable weather. The problem was me, ***my*** inexperience, doubts, lack of self-confidence, fears.

Well, there is no vaccine against those, and the only way I was going to get the experience is by doing it.

Logistics and Plans

Very well then. Where do I start?

Come now Rafa, don´t be facetious. Start where you always start. Make a to-do list!

The place to start was with the ***means***. Without a steady monthly income, I needed to find out how much I was actually worth, and to put those assets to work efficiently. This included property, investments, several pension funds accumulated during a lifetime of professional activity, and cash. I engaged a financial adviser to help me with this. After a while, and answering some hard questions, I had a fairly accurate idea of my financial resources.

Then I had to build a previsional P&L for the rest of my professionally active life, and a budget until I was settled again. *Ha! Fun…*

TO-DO LIST FOR A LIFE CHANGE

 # Sort your finances

 # Find a spot below the 40th Parallel

 # Buy a bachelor's pad on that spot

 # Sail to that spot on Nausikaä

 # Sell the house in the UK

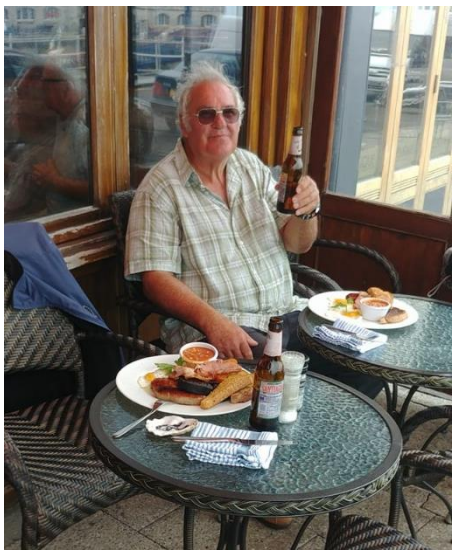
 # Once settled on your spot and your pad, get back on Nausikaä and follow the wind.

Being "settled" signifies here having a sense of permanency in one´s surroundings. I thought long and hard during those months about whether I was really the wandering gypsy, free-roaming type that could live happily on a boat for an undetermined period of time. Many have done it and do it still. Look at the crew of *Delos*, or *La Vagabonde*. It is certainly within the realm of the possible. However, no matter how I articulated the question, the answer was always the same. ***Not really!*** This means that whatever spot and pad I chose to settle in, it had to be one I could come to consider ***my place*** on this planet, even if it was more a refuge than a home or a nest. I didn´t much care, a rocky overhang would do, but I would always need a place to come back to.

To make a long story short, in the space of eight months in 2018 I had: (1) sorted my finances; all my liquid assets were now consolidated and invested, (2) the house in Bracknell was up for sale, (3) found a spot and put down the deposit for a pad: Torrevieja (38th Parallel), a holiday town not far from Alicante in Spain, and (4) partially planned the trip there from Lowestoft on Nausikaä. I had charted the journey in detail in OCPN all the way from Lowestoft to A Coruña in NW Spain, but not beyond that.

Everything seemed ready. There were some additional details I still needed to take care of in Nausikaä to prepare her for a long cruise, but apart from that, there was nothing major outstanding that I could think of.

Really? Had I run out of excuses? Had the fateful moment finally come about? Was this day to be the beginning of the end of my old life, or the end of the beginning of my new one, or whatever? Was ***I*** ready to slog it alone? Maybe I should get someone to come with me, even if it is only for part of the way.



Charlie. Brunch in Ramsgate, waiting for the weather to lift.

Entre Charlie Goff. I had known Charlie for several years, as he was my neighbour at the yard, and we had sailed together out of Lowestoft. In his younger days Charlie sailed the Mediterranean for a few years, living onboard his 36-footer ketch with a young family. He had crossed Biscay several times in both directions and is a RYA instructor. An easy-going, amenable and congenial guy, and a steadying influence at sea.

Over a few dinners and many beers in Lowestoft, I dangled the adventure hook in front of him dressed up in the best verbal bait I could master. It didn´t take Charlie long to bite, and eventually he agreed to join the trip up to A Coruña, where he would decide whether to continue to Gibraltar or fly back to England.

I think Charlie was somewhat nostalgic of his care-free, foot lose days liveabording in the sunny Med, and wanted to give that good life one more try before he hanged his long-distance sailor boots for good. He was also ill even then, a detail he neglected to mention to me at the time. Very naughty of him. Charlie was taking a cocktail of medicines by the fistful several times a day that had him pickled in chemicals for the time we were together on the boat.

Once I had Charlie´s agreement to join, we spend a couple of weeks finalising the details of the first few legs of the trip and set the cast-off day for the 4th of August.

Route to the Sunshine

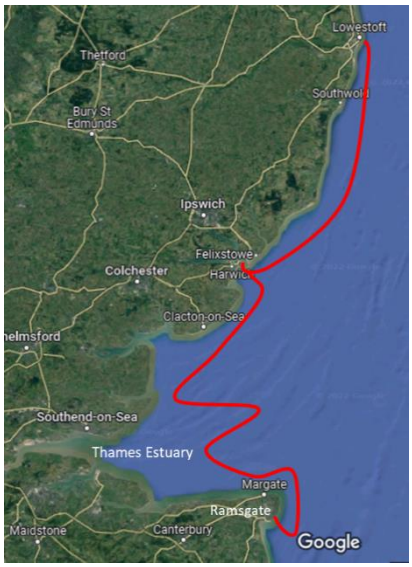
The entire journey was divided into four sections as follows: (1) The English Channel: Lowestoft to Brest, (2) The Bay of Biscay: Brest to A Coruña, (3) The Atlantic Seaboard: A Coruña to Gibraltar, and (4) The Southern Med: Gibraltar to Alicante, all roughly the same distance, about 600 NM, and all with similar anticipated challenges. I had estimated it would take us between six and eight weeks to get to Gibraltar without hurrying or having to put to sea in uncomfortably bad weather. Of the above, I had charted the route up to A Coruña, not beyond.

THE ENGLISH CHANNEL

The first step was to get from Lowestoft to Ramsgate in Kent. Or to Dover. From there, there are two routes south. One route is to continue along the south English coast to Portsmouth, and then cross the channel to the Channel Islands and northern France. The other route is to cross the Pas de Calais at Calais, and then hug the French coast to Cherbourg. Either is possible, neither better than the other given the right weather conditions. Which one to choose would be determined by winds and seas.

There is a third way. That is to sail west to Plymouth or Torquay along the south English coast, and then make a long offshore jump to Brest, but that´s a four-tide, 170 NM, +48-hour passage. Best weather and steady westerlies are required for that one.

Charlie and I agreed we would decide which way to go once we got to Ramsgate.

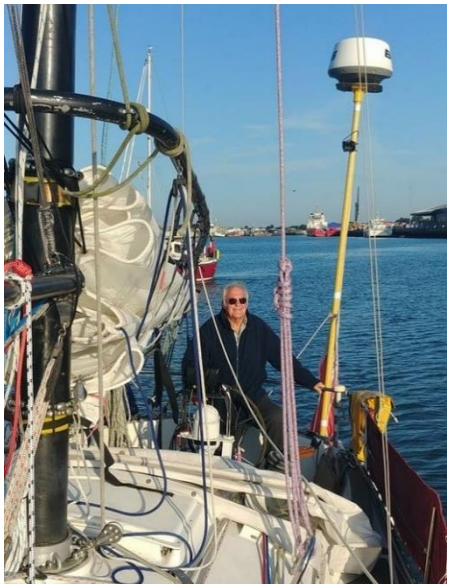


Lowestoft to Ramsgate – 80 NM

We left Lowestoft, I for the last time ever, early in the morning on Aug 04, a Saturday. Despite the early hour everyone at the yard came to bid us goodbye and fair winds. Gail (the manageress of the yard) gave us a tupperware full of cheese and Branson onion pickle sandwiches, Kevin, her husband, a bottle of rum for the ride. Many hugs, a few tears, and we were on our way!

Paul Sheader, already retired from business by then, joined the ride on his boat as far as the Orwell River, as he was continuing upstream to Ipswich, so Charlie and I decided to overnight in Harwich, and carry on across the Thames estuary the following day.

We left Lowestoft with high expectations of a steady and swift progress south. Justifiably so. We had had gentle steady northerly winds for the previous two weeks in the North Sea. The only low-pressure systems in the North Atlantic were around Iceland and were predicted to blow off way north of us.

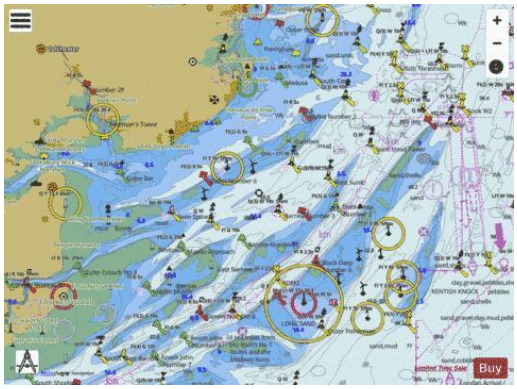


Charlie at the helm, steaming out of Lowestoft the morning of our departure.

But right from the start the expected north winds never materialised. Instead, as if to mock my arrogance, a relentless southerly set in, around 20 knots on average but with gusts up to 35. We arrived in Harwich and the Orwell River well enough, but once there, we were locked in. Charlie and I attempted the crossing of the Thames estuary twice, the following morning and then three days later, and had to turn back twice with our tail between our legs. It was just impossible to sail straight upwind against the chop in the shallows.

Nausikaä was very uncomfortable in those conditions. She just does not ride this type of swell well. She climbs up the

wave and then sinks her bow in the gap; up and down, as if riding a mechanical bull in a fair! We made absolutely no headway on the engine. Just caterpillar up and down the waves making no forward progress at all.



Bathymetry of the Thames Estuary

On the second attempt, on Aug 07, we made it to the entrance of the Black Deep canal. This is the "middle" channel in the estuary, 8 meters deep and about 500 meters wide on average, where we met a frightening 2.5 m breaking swell with a 4 sec period.

Eventually, after one hour of holding on for dear life, and fearing some critical equipment breakage in that washing machine, we decided to turn back. Getting to the entrance of the Black Deep from Harwich, close hauled (wind at 35 degrees), took us six hours. Getting back on the same route on a broad reach (wind at 145 degrees) took us less than three, and the log was clocking 8 knots regularly. Nausikaä's hull speed is 6.2 knots!

There is no room to wriggle in the Thames estuary, and it can´t be crossed North-to-South in a straight line. No room to tack upwind in the narrow channels between the sand banks and wind farms and going offshore around it means getting fully into the traffic separation zone at the northern end of the Straights of Dover. We didn´t want to do that sailing upwind either.

Finally, on the 9th of Aug the wind gave us a break (although still from the SW) to cross the estuary and we sailed off from our anchorage in the Orwell. We had been there five days!

I strongly suggest no-one, on any boat, attempts this passage in anything but ideal conditions. Whatever that may mean in England. You will survive it but won't have a good time of it.

We arrived in Ramsgate from Harwich late in the evening of the 9th, having taken twice as long as anticipated to get across the estuary. There were some anxious moments coming into port, as the lights on the buoys marking the entry channel were often impossible to tell apart from the town´s street and billboard lights. And there we got stuck again in bad weather for two weeks!

Gales out of nowhere every three days that kept us cowering in the harbour for two weeks overall, and south-westerlies, stubborn to the point of idiocy, funnelling into the English Channel. Precisely the direction we wanted to go.

Strong south westerlies also bottle-up the south running ebb tides around the Dover straights, wind against tide. The surface water has nowhere to go but up in a horrendous breaking swell.

Traffic in the Thames Estuary

The port quickly filled up with Belgium, Dutch, and French boats taking refuge from the 50 knot winds. Everyone shaken, everyone forlorn-looking and frustrated, and not really a good vibe around the place.

I left Nausikaä tied eight-ways to the pontoon in Ramsgate and went back to Bracknell to wait for the weather systems to blow over, do some R&R, and say good-bye to Dani on his way to the land of the Thousand and One Nights.

Finally, on August 20th, three weeks after departure from Lowestoft on the 4th, we set off across the Pas de Calais.

Crossing the *Pas de Calais* – Ramsgate to Boulogne, 55 NM

Veeeeery difficult! I was told. I was warned. Crossing the English Channel at Calais? You´ve got do it with seven eyes and 383 degrees of peripheral vision. It's the busiest route in the world!

It is! and you must cross it perpendicular to the TSZ. Those are the rules. That also means that from Ramsgate, at right angles, one arrives in Calais, not Boulogne. From Calais you then must make a turn south towards Boulogne and sail through the coastal traffic area, outside the main channel.

Leaving behind the cliffs of Dover and the North Sea.

But we had the ubiquitous SW winds at about 15 knots. That means we had to sail straight upwind the last 20 miles of the passage. I said to hell with the rules. If anyone complains, so be it, I´ll take the rap! And I plotted a course

RAMSGATE (Saturday 10th August)

Being stuck in port waiting for the storm to pass is the most effective taming device. There is nothing to do on board but making sure, for the umpteenth time, that the moorings are neither too tight nor too loose, that the fenders protect Nausikaä as best they can against the pontoon, that everything resisting the wind is secured and as low as possible on deck and all ropes are tied with three knots. I've lowered the dodger to minimize the effect of the wind, so now I don't even have protection in the cockpit; I'm locked up in the cabin.

The wind gauge oscillates from 20 to 35 knots in a matter of seconds, and this is inside the harbour. The BBC's notice to mariners forecasts 45+ knots (force 8 Beaufort) in the Pas-de-Calais, over 80km-hour, and the barometer keeps on dropping. We've got wind for a while!

Trapped like us are a couple of German ships, three Dutch, and a Frenchman, some families with children; all with the same taciturn faces of discomfort, frustration and boredom. We would all like to be somewhere else, in another time.

Ramsgate is a typical English east coast port, once busy with fishing and trade, now in recession and decline.

The road that lies over the harbour and the two or three surrounding streets are attractive, with Victorian architecture. But further up the hill, you can see the abandonment and the lack of opportunities. Entire street blocks with boarded-up shops and FOR RENT signs. What remains open are "everything-for-a-pound" shops, hole-in-the-wall for kebab and fish-and-chip takeaways, sports betting sites, and employment agencies.

Nothing to do in Ramsgate with bad weather but sit in a pub to drink beer. Many of those... pubs. That's what I'll probably end up doing this afternoon.

directly to Boulogne, at an angle of 45 degrees with the TSZ instead of 90.

Well, all the warnings and advice - I'm sure, best intentioned - were unnecessary. A couple of container ships in a hurry, and as many bored bulk carriers in transit to Rotterdam or Hamburg was all we saw. And none of them came to within 3 miles of us. Courteous too, one of them changed course a few degrees so as not to scare us.

Crossing the Pas de Calais, Charlie at the helm

We crossed the Channel (12 miles across with our route) in just over 4 hours with a fresh breeze on the beam, and no stress.

Once on the French side Eolo got upset at himself for making things so easy for us and sent us, once again, a raving South-westerly without warning. Neither PredictWind, nor Windy, nor the British Met Office mentioned that in the previous day's forecast. So, the last 20 miles were equally with the wind in our noses, and against the tidal current.

Charlie and I arrived at the entrance of the access channel of Boulogne exhausted, tired of fighting the waves and reefing and shaking reefs on the sails trying to adapt to the wind.

The entrance to Boulogne is narrow, and we were in a hurry. We wanted the floor beneath our feet to stop moving! We go to the yacht harbour, moored on the first pontoon that appeared vacant, and without even registering at the marina we headed to the first bar that appeared open, to order cold beer and peanuts in French. And once we were seated and refreshed, Charlie and I wondered, in despair, why the frigging ground on dry land couldn't stop dancing once and for all!

Boulogne to Le Havre (via Dieppe), 140 NM

After our exertions crossing the Pas de Calais, Charlie and I decided we needed some R&R time to recover, so stayed in Boulogne for one additional day. Winds were steady from the SW anyway, so no great loss of opportunity.

Boulogne is a nice town, typically provincial French, and with a rather eclectic architecture; nineteen-seventies prefab apartment blocks on the cliff-side to the N of the harbour, a few glass 20-storey buildings in the centre of town housing banks and insurance companies and, inter-spaced haphazardly, 19th century 4-storey buildings with ornate wroth iron balconies and steep lead-clad roofs dotted with round windows.

Only after a while of trying to figure the place out, I conjectured that it must have suffered quite a bit during WWII. Much of the original architecture likely came down then in a pile of bricks and was replaced with functional buildings in the spaces cleared from the rubble.

Definitely provincially French. Here (and in Dieppe later, and in every other town I have visited in France ever since!) everything closes between 12:00 and 14:00 for lunch. I say “provincially” because in Paris, the lunch break is only one hour.

But either in Paris or in the provinces, the French undertake lunch with the fervour and devotion befitting a religious ceremony. The Arabs go to prayer at lunchtime. The French, more pragmatically, go to lunch.

After being rested, refreshed, and re-beered, Charlie and I set off for Dieppe, our next stop, with good weather and light SW winds. Made the distance in one day, motorsailing mostly, but running pretty much the whole way with the tide. The stop in Dieppe was required by the tidal dynamics in that part of the channel. It was spring tides then and the current runs at 5 or 6 knots for six hours in opposite directions on the southern shore of the English Channel. It made no sense to beat into the wind and against the tide for six hours at night, just to make 10 miles of headway overground during that time. Better catch the next tide bus into Le Havre the following day.

The entry to Dieppe is a narrow two-mile channel flanked by sand banks that dry a low tide. The entrance to the harbour even narrower; perhaps 60 m wide, between a huge pier to the south, and a submerged sill to the north which, by nightfall when we arrived, was barely visible. We went in under sail, chased by a ferry, only by the expeditious method or rubbing Vaseline on the sides of Nausikaä, and then up the river for 1/4 mile to the marina, and moored on the visitor’s berth.

From the landscape perspective, Dieppe has a completely different character to Boulogne. For starters, it is an artisanal fishing harbour set in a deep ravine in between chalk cliffs. Lots of crabbers, lobster pod fishermen, and small trawlers. There is a large, colourful fish market right in the middle of town, and the architecture resembles (on the waterfront at least) that of Flemish cities.

Dieppe harbour

The next tide was in the evening of the following day, so we rested that night, and spend the next morning legging it through the fish market, where we ate a bucket of mussels *a la Provençale* with a bottle of chilled white Rhône that tasted like nectar of the gods.

The food, if not the weather, is definitely better in France!!

That evening we were off to Le Havre with the tide. Sixty miles overnight passage through a fairly busy traffic area, and up the persistent south-westerlies. When will they stop!!!!

Comparatively, the passage demanded more attention than that of the Pas de Calais, with trawlers all around us that changed direction unexpectedly, lobster pods everywhere, and a few ferries throwing a big wake that carried for miles.

One good thing in these waters, the fishermen pods are buoyed with a coloured flag, easily visible during the day but also at night. The fabric of the flag must be made of some radar-reflecting material, because they lit up like a Christmas tree on my radar screen. This happened only on the north coast of France. Elsewhere, fishermen´s pods and nets became the bane of the trip.

The winds picked up during my dog watch, so I had to tack several times. In one of those tacks over the swell of the running tide, Charlie, who was asleep in the forward cabin, was lifted up in the air and thrown off the bunk.

I set the course on the compass, chose one of the brightest stars I could see, no idea which exactly, and navigated by it against the main mast for over two hours with the chartplotter switched off. And you know, it works…. by the end of my watch, I was only five degrees off course!

I don't mind the midnight watch. It is like peeking through the eye of a telescope. The universe is reduced to the lights you can see on the barely distinguishable horizon, and then the stars on top of you, overwhelming. Few parameters, fewer constraints, no clutter, no noise, no distraction, no urgencies. Not like life. Mind the lights on the horizon, follow the star you've chosen, and everything will be all right.

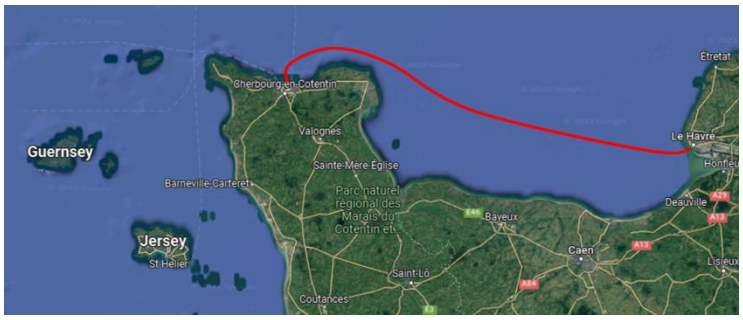
Oer d'oeuvres in Le Havre

We came into Le Havre through the entry between the N and S breakwaters on a port broad reach, followed by a French military vessel, a large frigate, in one hell of a hurry to get in. Those guys (not only in France but everywhere!) do not slow down for anyone, and they do not observe the COLREGs, so if you value your life, you get out of the way! The yacht harbour in Le Havre is immediately behind the N breakwater, so Charlie and I had to do a very tight gybe to avoid the (forbidden to us) main channel and head for the marina, with the French Navy breathing in our ear.

Le Havre is a large city, and a huge commercial and military port. Charlie and I did not venture into the city during our short stay there, but the beach front north of the port is very attractive, a wide boulevard with dozens of bars, cafés and restaurants dotted along the marine drive. And the place was packed with tourists, so it is evidently also a popular holiday destination for Parisians.

We arrived in Le Havre mid-morning. By the time we had registered at the marina and sorted out the paperwork, it was lunchtime. We know what the French do at lunch time, so we followed suit!

Le Havre to Cherbourg. 75 NM, overnight passage.



We left Le Havre with the running evening tide the following day, in a thick fog, for the overnight passage across the beaches and flats of Normandy, to Cherbourg, at the tip of the Cotentin peninsula.

The winds had picked up from the NNW, useful enough but only just, and the fog dissipated by midnight. Again, I had the dog watch, alone with the sea, the wind, and the stars. There was a lot of phosphorescence in the water that night, surprisingly so, as it was very cold. By 01:30 a dozen or so dolphins came to say hello for a few minutes, riding Nausikaä's wake. I could not leave the wheel, so rather than observing them, I could a most listen to them breaking the surface to breathe just a few feet away from me.

We made good progress at 4.5 knots SOG average but at 03:00 the tide turned, and we began to lose speed. At the top of the flood tide we were doing only about 2 knots SOG, that's with the engine chugging at 28K revs.

It is one of those things in these waters. You can never have it even. Make excellent progress for a few hours, and appalling progress for the same number of hours thereafter. It is also a fixture of passage planning; if you don't factor it in, you end up making no progress at all, or going backwards, literally.

The plotter gets very confused. Of course, it assumes the direction you are travelling over ground, is the direction your boat is pointing to. In the meanwhile, you may be doing one knot in the direction you are pointing to, and two knots sideways, or backwards, carried by the water that moves underneath you. If you have no clear landmarks to orient yourself by (e.g. at night, or too far offshore) the only indicators of reality are what the GPS and the compass tell you, and these could differ by 15 or 20 degrees. Of course, you learn all this in your sailing classroom training. But it's one thing to speculate on hypothetical course and speed over a nautical chart in a room that does not move, and a very different thing perplexing over the apparent confusion of your instruments when you are in control of the wheel in total darkness and starting to doubt your sanity.

On my following watch, at 06:00, I had a bit of an anxious time negotiating the tide rush, wind against tide, over and around the eastern tip of Contentin. Some of the swell that Nausikaä hates, that I detest, and that makes everything onboard suddenly want to declare its independence from whatever bounds restrict them. Books crawl off shelves, everything groans, clanks, and squeaks. The microwave came flying off its nest in the galley and ended up underneath the navigation table. A bottle of soy sauce broke in the galley's cupboard spilling its content all over the place. As a result, even a week later, the whole boat smelled like a Japanese restaurant. Yep, one messy time.

Cherbourg inner and outer harbours. The red area is military. The yellow area is the sports marina. Ferry and commercial docs to the right of the picture.

The wind dropped to almost nothing on the lee of the Contentin peninsula and we made it to Cherbourg on a glorious sunny and warm morning, to tie up in the excellent marina there, put some order onboard, and catch up with some ZZs left over from the night before. 09:00 in the morning was too early for a cold beer, even for the likes of Charlie and me.

I had a prolonged stay in Cherbourg, firstly forced by the weather, then obliged by an annoying water leak in the exhaust system of the engine, that kept me waiting for a spare part to arrive to the chandler for four days.

Cherbourg harbour is enormous. It is divided into two sections, an older inner harbour with two breakwaters that enclose the commercial and fishing port, and an outer harbour protected by a 2.5 miles dyke with deep entrances at either end, crowned with stone fortifications. The construction dates from the Napoleonic era.

An absolute pleasure for the yachtsman. You can come in/out under sail with ease, and once inside, there´s lots and lots of room in deep water to turn into the wind, hoist or abate sail, tidy up, put fenders out, etc, all protected from the wind and the swell of the Atlantic. Well done Bonnie!!

The inner harbour has a military area to the west. Do not enter unless you want to get over the VHF a very loud and stern warning from the French Navy to bugger off, with subsequent perceptive observations about your IQ, your

CHERBOURG

How true is the old saying that the best things in life are for free. Or nearly. Particularly adequate also when one is a budget traveller! Since I must wait here, let´s enjoy the town!

And Cherbourg IS enjoyable. A major commercial and military port since the 17th Century, Cherbourg has an enormous outer deep harbour protected by a 2.5 miles sea wall with two wide entrances, flanked at each end with stone fortifications - castles really - build by Napoleon.

The old part of town is delightful to leg up and down. A beautiful gothic cathedral that, judging from the still visible bullet pokes on the walls, has seen a lot. Lots of neo-classical buildings, churches and monasteries, interspaced a bit haphazardly with granite houses with oak trusses and slate roofs. And in between, small, intimate cobbled squares with round singing fountains; dribbles of water spilling over and running through stone troughs on the ground until they disappear into a sewer.

The feel of the old town close to the harbour somehow reminded me of Wells in the UK.

Now that I was on my own again, and with time to burn, I could indulge my curiosity and my fantasy. Narrow corners, shy nooks, and shady passageways between the houses bait your attention and invite you to have a peek around the crumbling flint-node wall, to explore the next stone yard, hidden garden, unexpected charm.

Simple joys. During those leggings up and down of mine I spotted a small traditional bakery, a cheese shop, a tiny butchery, to indulge my fancy. For the last four days of my stay in Cherbourg I deliberately got up at 06:00 and was queuing outside the baker at 08:30, come rain or shine, for a hot-off-the-oven large baguette and a Pain de Champagne *for my breakfast.*

ability to read nautical charts, and what part of the "*ENTREÉ INTERDIT*" signs on the yellow buoys did you NOT understand?

Justifiably so, they build nuclear submarines over there.

The eastern part of the inner harbour is devoted to commercial and sport activities. There were two or three huge cruise liners at any time in the port, and a buzz of small fishing vessels. The 1000-berth marina has excellent facilities, and the atmosphere is relaxed. That meaning they are not after you day in and day out checking if you have paid your dues. Unlike other places I've been.

Cherbourg-en-Contentin. The old harbour

Change of Plans (Sep 13)

The day after our arrival in Cherbourg, Charlie, my adventure companion in since I left Lowestoft over a month before, announced that he had to return home. Family problems demanded his immediate presence. He said that it would take him a few days to fix the issues at home, and that once this was done, he would try to rejoin the expedition.

OK… no problemo amigo, I thought. These things happen.

Instead of making the passage in one leg from Cherbourg to Roscoff in Bretagne, as the two of us had originally planned, I will go on my own to the island of Guernsey (or perhaps Jersey; about two-fifths of the way) and wait there for Chalie to rejoin. There are multiple daily flights and *ferries* between the Islands and the UK, so traveling is relatively easy. At the end of the day, 40 miles solo sailing from Cherbourg to Guernsey was not a Roman's task.

With this understanding between the two, Charlie returned to England that same afternoon.

By the time I got back to the boat 30 mins later, the baguette had been devoured. Some gloriously stinky cheese and cured meats bought at La Cave Au Fromage*, and a drizzle of olive oil on the bread, saw me through to dinner with a big smile on my face!*

BTW, I also ate a loaf of bread with dough made with seawater. Apparently, a local tradition since the Middle Ages. Nice hot with butter!

I rediscovered in Cherbourg some simple pleasures the appreciation of which urban life in the UK knocks ruthlessly out of you in a jiffy. To sit on one of those old-fashioned foldable iron chairs in a roadside cafe, with an expresso or a beer, lean back, and let the world spin around. This as a matter of daily routine, not exceptional week-end outing. Cherche la femme*, definitely more* cherche-*able that the home-grown variety.*

After a sunny afternoon in Cherbourg, the frustration of being locked up in harbour and unable to make progress, the boredom setting in when you've done everything onboard you could possibly think of to prepare, tidy-up, and improve, and now there's nothing else to do but wait; all that disappears like a low coastline in the mist, loses its significance, and makes us feel quite silly and ashamed of our own folly, our own blind ignorance as to what really are the best things in life.

Sailing in this part of the world, nothing, absolutely nothing should be taken for granted. At the first opportunity I had with a favourable wind forecast, I attempted to make the passage to Guernsey.

To put it all in context, Guernsey belongs to a group of rocky islands located in the English Channel, just off the French coast, which includes Jersey, Sark, Herm, Alderney, and small rocky outcrops and reefs that extend in all directions and dry up at low tide.

It's not exactly an easy area to navigate, because of the terrain itself, but also because of the tidal currents that run in the channels between the islands in unexpected directions and at Formula 1 speeds. I was confident though. The weather was clear, with good visibility, and I have an excellent chartplotter with up-to-date charts... As said, not a Roman's task.

On the first attempt, I didn't have a sober understanding of the strength of the tidal currents. Here again, intimate knowledge of local conditions is essential.

In this group of islands, Alderney, a rocky promontory two miles long by one wide, is the northernmost and closest to the French coast. Between Alderley and Cape de la Hague in the northwest corner of the Contentin Peninsula, there is a channel about 6 miles wide. Through this channel the tide evacuates most of the water that enters the French half of the English Channel and runs at a speed of 8 or 9 knots during spring tides. On the Admiralty charts, the channel between Alderney and Cape Hague is referred to as *"Alderney Rushes".*

It is near impossible to cross the channel against the tide. That much I knew. I planned the passage so as to be rounding Cape de la Hague at the exact moment when the direction of the tidal current changed direction to the south. Once in the middle of the southward moving stream, the descent to Guernsey should be relatively easy.

That also meant that the distance from Cherbourg to Cape de la Hague, 12 miles in a westerly direction, must be covered against the tide that is still flowing eastward. I calculated 4 hours at 3.5 knots SOG. The charts said that the tidal current slows down the closer you get to the coast. Logical; Close to the coast, with a good wind behind me, why not?

I left Cherbourg before dawn at high tide and a light wind from the NW (instead of the N that PredictWind had promised me). It took me longer than expected to hoist the sails in the dark, but at last I set sail 40 mins late through the harbour west entrance. As I will have the tide in my favour a little before I reach Cape de la Hague, I will have to make up for the time lost in the transit between the cape and Guernsey.

No problemo amigo. Big problemo amigo. For starters, the average 3.5 SOG knots never materialized; 3.0 is the most I could do in the direction I was going, with NW winds and the engine, and against the tide. I also made the mistake of getting too close to the coast. By the time I reached

Cape de la Hague, an hour and a half later than planned, I was a mile from the rocky shore, with a hellish tide behind (from the east), and a wind that stubbornly kept blowing from the NW. Wind over tide with shallow depth.

To the north of Cape de la Hague there are deep rocky reefs that spread like a fan in all directions; around 20 meters on the ridge but with depths of up to 40 meters in the valleys between them. At those depths, I expected the effect of any turbulence on the surface to be minimal. What a mistake! The water boiled around Nausikaä with vertical currents generated by the steep reefs.

Going around Cap de la Hague turned out to be not a Roman´s task, but rather a Herculean one for Nausikaä and me. I encountered a 3-meter swell, coming from various directions, every 3 or 4 seconds, against which I could not make way, and with the wind pushing me inexorably towards the shore. I confess I got a bit scared. Nausikaä doesn't sail well in those conditions. She would plunge her bow into the waves and crawl up the next ones without progressing in any direction.

I tried to round the Cape for an hour in that washing machine until, fearing some critical breakage of equipment (in which case it would have generated a real emergency), I turned the rudder back to Cherbourg, to await the pleasure of the gods of winds and tides.

In other words, the way back was against 6 knots of current, and with wind behind. For two long hours I sailed north towards England, through the tidal current, without moving an inch in the direction I wanted to go, simply to get away from the shore.

Cap de la Hague, wind against tide

In short, I arrived back in Cherbourg after dark, with no breakages on board, but exhausted, and with my tail between my legs.

Oh dear… I still have so much to learn!

While recovering from the shock of the failed attempt In Cherbourg, I met Pablo Alcázar. Pablo is a Chilean, a navy officer by profession, and at that time attached to the Chilean embassy in London. Pablo has a 42-foot Swan, a beautiful boat, and he was like me waiting for a change in the wind to leave for Jersey. He approached Nausikaä at the marina one day because he spotted a Uruguayan flag flying in between the masts.

Grateful both to be able to speak Spanish with someone, we met one rainy afternoon in the cabin of the *Beagle,* Pablo's Swan, to study the route to Guernsey so that I would not repeat the mistakes of three days ago. This was a blessing. Pablo had experience in those waters, having made the crossing of the channel from England many times, and sailed between the islands and the French coast for several seasons. During a couple of hours, and in between frequent kisses to a bottle of Calvados that he had on board, Pablo gave me priceless advice towards an effective and trouble-free passage.

The secret, he said, of sailing to Guernsey upwind is: (1) to make the crossing with neap tides, (2) not get too close to the coast when leaving Cherbourg, and (3) use the *Alderley Rushes* wisely. On the nautical chart Pablo drew arrows indicating tidal currents that did not appear on the IMRAY current map, nor in any of the cruising guides that I had on board. In short, nowhere.

Again, as if it were ever in doubt, local knowledge is priceless.

Pablo and I left the next day, at 02:00 in the morning, he to Jersey, I to Guernsey. The passage to Guernsey, while not relaxing, was uneventful. I left earlier than on the previous attempt to give myself ample time to reach Cape de la Hague without stress or trouble, passed the cape with comparative ease at dawn, and thence, as the wind failed to make an appearance, it was chiefly the tide that carried me to Guernsey. I entered through the mouth of St Peter's Port in Guernsey at four o'clock in the afternoon; tired, but not exhausted, and with a smile from ear to ear.

Halfway Up the Stairs

I´m only halfway up the stairs, not up or down

Sixto Rodríguez

The day after I arrived in Guernsey I phoned Charlie to let him know that I had arrived, and to ask when he planned to rejoin the trip as we had agreed. He told me that he would no longer be able to continue and wished me good luck.

It was almost the worst possible situation! Guernsey is in the middle of nowhere. I could not stay there and any route south to the French coast would take 18 to 20 hours at least. What to do?

That night, moored to the visitor pontoon at the marina of St. Peter's Port, it was time to carefully take stock of everything that had happened since August 4, and to make decisions objectivity for the future.

Two questions needed to be answered: (1) What to do immediately? and (2) what to do about the rest of the planned trip?

Regarding question number two, it was then September 17th. By that date, the original sailing plan had me at the latitude of Cape St. Vincent in Portugal. It had taken me six weeks to sail less than a quarter of the total distance to Gibraltar.

GUERNSEY

Guernsey, or more accurately the "Bailiwick of Guernsey", which also includes the islands of Sark, Herm, and Alderney, is one of those places in the world that should not exist in the 21st century. Like Gibraltar.

It is usually regarded as a British dependency but is not and never has been part of the United Kingdom. The islands are the property of the British Crown, and the monarch of the day appoints a trusted Governor from time to time. They have their own governance structures, laws, police, customs, budgets, and currency. They only depend on the United Kingdom (by agreement) in matters of defence and foreign relations.

Around the year 900, the Vikings settled there, and when they became Norman, the islands became part of the Duchy of Normandy. When William I (the Conqueror) became king of England, the French told him that he had to choose between being Norman and French (and therefore a vassal of the king of France) or being English.

The clever Willie chose to be English but argued that the islands were always his personal property, and never part of France, and therefore incorporated them into the kingdom of England as personal dependencies. This situation remains to this day.

If you're not a native of the islands, you must be a billionaire – literally – to be allowed to live and buy property there, and even then, not every brick and patch of ground is within your reach. Natives do not pay personal income tax or VAT. Foreign companies based there (mostly banks and financial institutions) pay corporate taxes, but local companies do not. The only tax revenues the treasury receives are in exchange for the public services it provides.

Twenty-five thousand people live very well in the Bailiwick of Guernsey, mainly from fishing, farming, and tourism, and from all the rich Englishmen with 30 or 40 metre superyachts (there were a couple of those in St Peter's Port when I arrived) who come for the day from Southampton, Jersey, or Gosport for a round of golf. Kind of a northern St Tropez, but without the good weather or the chic.

I may have loitered for a day here or there, sightseeing or to get a good night's rest, but the bulk of the delay was caused by the weather. Days and days cowering in port like a badger its hole, waiting for the storms and contrary winds to pass, in Harwich, Ramsgate, Boulogne, and most recently in Cherbourg. It was evidently impossible for me to continue with the original plan, let alone doing it on my own. The nights were getting cold, and autumn was upon me.

And with autumn come the gales in the Bay of Biscay and the northwest corner of the Iberian Peninsula. Even if I were able to cross Biscay, it was likely that I would be stranded in some port or estuary in northern Spain anyway.

The conclusion was inescapable. I had to interrupt the voyage somewhere in France, leave Nausikaä to overwinter in the hard, and resume the cruise in the spring of the following year.

The answer to question number one was more complex. Since I left Lowestoft, my days and nights of sailing had been somewhat heavy-going. Naturally, these things are relative, and each sailor has his own conception of what is easy or difficult. To put it in other terms, it wasn't in my dreams or plans to put to sea to have a hard time. For me, sailing in bad weather, alone and uncomfortable, is not altogether having a great time. Some sailors thrive on it, I don´t much care for that.

I suspect this was the real reason why Charlie decided not to rejoin in Guernsey, regardless of any family problems he might have had, which I'm sure weren't made up. Quite simply, the sailing became too uphill, too heavy-going. Unless he didn't want to sail with me anymore, which is also possible. Or both. All this reasoning made me cautious when deciding how to proceed immediately.

In any case I couldn't stay in Guernsey, and I most definitely didn't want to go back. The most attractive option was to continue to Brest and interrupt the journey there. Brest had advantages; it is a great city, with good communications, two large marinas where I could leave Nausikaä for the winter, and with many nautical service providers nearby for the repairs and maintenance that may be needed next year.

Brest also represented a change in sailing conditions and cruising style that could be expected in the future. Brest is the southern tip of the English Channel. South of Brest: no more stubborn SW winds, no more gales coming out of know not where, no more tidal currents flowing in opposite directions every six hours at 7 knots speed, no more integral calculus to estimate SOGs and COGs. I was already fed up with all that. In my imagination at least, Brest was an attractive proposition as a gateway to the sun, the indigo blue sea, and "good times" sailing next year.

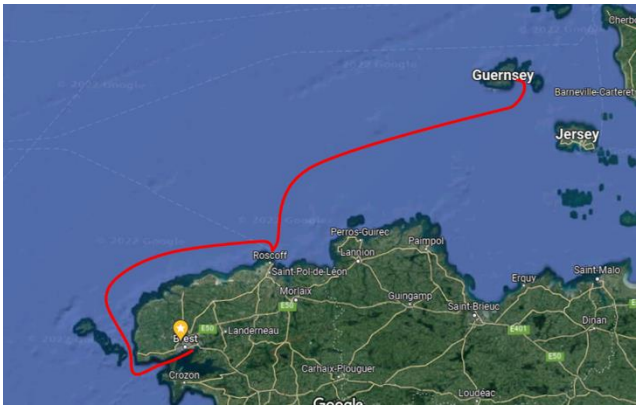
But I still had to get there. For the next two days in Guernsey, I visited the island's two yacht clubs, and all the sailors' pubs I could find, looking for someone who would like to come with me to Brest. There is always someone who needs a few more sea miles to complete the requirements of this certificate or that permit. Well, that week, all those guys were somewhere else!

That night I said to myself: *Damn it all! I'll do it on my own or it will be left undone!*

Guernsey to Brest (via Roscoff and L'Aber Wrac´h) 180 NM

That same night I left for Roscoff at 20:00. It was a long passage, between 18 and 20 hours, and with three tides, one of which would always be against me. I chose to let the tide against me be in the middle of the passage, at night in the Gulf of Bretagne. Considering that I had no first-hand experience in this part of the world, I preferred to arrive at Roscoff near the top of the tide and with manageable currents.

It was a wonderful waning moon night, with good visibility, broad reaching on the starboard side with a 14 knots wind. The first four hours were pleasant and stress-free. For the first time in the whole trip, I had the opportunity to turn on the autopilot and go below to make myself a cup of coffee and sit in the cockpit for more than 10 minutes at a time.



Didn´t last long. Around midnight, with the change of the tide, the sea became quite rough. I had two-meter waves and the wind increased to 18 knots and started to change direction across my stern sporadically and quite unpredictably. This obliged me to put two reefs on the sails, standing always at the helm to avoid violent accidental gybes. Any hope of being able to sleep that night was completely gone.

Even so, I stuck to the pilot plan and I arrived all the *waypoints* with about 15 minutes variance. On an 80-mile trip, and if I can say so myself, that's as much good sailing as good planning.

The wind slowed down to 8 knots by dawn. I entered Roscoff mid-morning, 20 minutes earlier than planned, on a spectacular sunny day. I was, however, very tired. A few minutes after mooring, the customs port police showed up (for the first time in the trip). They searched for contraband in every compartment, bilge, nook and cranny Nausikaä has. They were courteous and efficient but held me up for over an hour answering questions and filling out forms. When they finally left, it was lunchtime, so I did what the French do at that hour.

Later I will write a few lines about Roscoff; a charming little town that could have served as stage for all The Three Musketeers movies.

During the morning, I was still running on adrenaline, but after lunch and making the digestion, I felt tired. The plan to leave for Brest on the afternoon tide was abandoned. I was in no condition; I had to rest!

L'Aber Wrac'h

Rounding the westernmost tip of the French *Finistère* is the *Île* d *'Ouessant*, famous for several reasons. One of them is that most of the crew members of the French maritime rescue service (the *SNSM: Société Nationale de Sauvetage en Mer*) are from there, not only now but traditionally since the beginning of the last century. It is a tradition among the families of the island that the children are sea rescuers.

Between the island and the French coast there is a channel, the *Chenal de Four*, narrow, shallow, and dotted with small islands, reefs, and submerged obstacles. All the cruising guides I had read recommended crossing the *Chenal de Four* during the day and only in good conditions; i.e. with the tide, with good visibility, little swell, etc, etc.

The stopover at L'Aber was not initially planned but became necessary. Again, the direct route from Roscoff to Brest (86 miles by the short way) required three tides, one of which would always be against me. It was to meet these conditions that I decided to stop for six hours in L'Aber to wait for the favourable tide.

Incidentally, "Aber" in Breton, a Celtic language, means river mouth or fjord. The entire northern coast of French Brittany is full of places called L'Aber this or that.

The sailing from Roscoff to L'Aber Wrac'h the next morning was uneventful. On leaving Roscoff I crossed the channel between the mainland and the *Ile de Batz* on the engine and in a hurry (the channel is zigzagging, very shallow, and navigable only on the two hours around high tide) and covered the rest of the way to L'Aber with a good beam breeze and overcast sky but no rain. I wasn't in a hurry. I was sailing with a metronome. Arriving before the change of the tide was just as bad as arriving after.

The Wrac'h estuary is narrow, shallow, and full of obstacles. In the space of a mile and a half there are eleven marker buoys: on the nautical chart with such charming names as "Wool Doll" and "The Little Butter Pot". I dropped the hook in the channel in front of the tiny marina, surrounded by mussel rafts and beautiful hills covered with pine forests. It wasn't worth mooring in the marina. I'd be there less than six hours.

Delfines riding the bow wake of Nausikaä

Nausikaä´s bow.

In summary, the last part of the journey to Brest, which I feared was going to be the most demanding, turned out to be the most enjoyable.

Arriving in Brest at 15:00 I entered through the mouth of the port and bumped head-on into Pablo Alcázar. Apparently, he had made the same crossing, always 12 hours ahead of me. What are the odds?

How big is the sea; How small is the world!

Brest

Sailing conditions were almost perfect. I left L'Aber in thick fog in the early morning, but by mid-morning it had cleared enough to have 3 miles visibility as I traversed the *Chenal de Four.* Conditions were good enough to be able to cook on board in the middle of the passage. I've never been able to do that since I left England!

I anticipated this being one of the most difficult passages of the whole trip. It turned out to be one of the easiest and most pleasurable. The strawberry on top of the cake was a group of dolphins that chased me for a couple of hours at the entrance to the channel, racing

Nausikaä newly arrived in Brest, moored to the waiting pontoon.

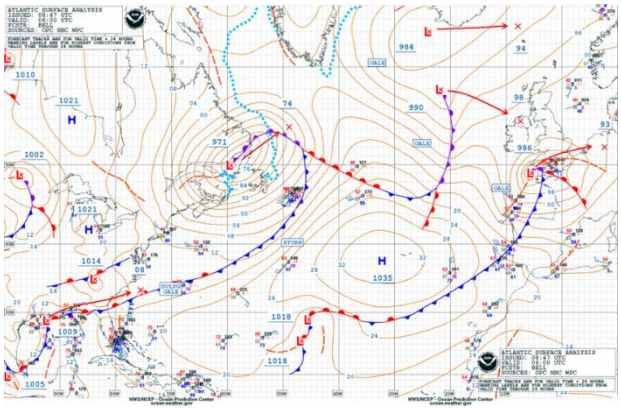
Beached Mermaid

Studying the weather forecast on the terrace of a bar in the marina in Brest

Brest is a beautiful city, and the Bay of Brest is a scenic wonder, but during the first few days there I didn't pay too much attention to them. I had to rest first, and then many things to think about.

It was September 21st. Could I continue south? I consulted with Pablo, but he shrugged his shoulders; he had never sailed farther south than Brest. On the afternoon of the second day of my arrival, sitting on the terrace of one of the bars surrounding the marina, I began to study the weather forecast. Large-scale study, of course. My experience up to that point indicated that no weather forecast more than 72 hours old was worth considering.

At large scale PredictWind, Windy, and the British and French Meteorological Offices indicated four low pressure centres in the North Atlantic: one, the weakest, which was imminently about to pass over me, the second northwest of the British Isles, the third in the latitude of Labrador in North America, and a fourth over Bermuda, with tropical storm strength, that could well become the last hurricane of the season.



GRIB of the 21rst of Septiember

Lonely and sad, Nausikaä is left to overwinter in Brest

It is true that the last one was very far away, but in a matter of 10 days or so, it could be knocking at the door of the Bay of Biscay, its course depending exclusively on the vagaries of the Jet Stream.

It was not a good scenario, and the expectation was for it to get worse as autumn progressed. The idea of staying in Brest and continuing the following year was becoming more and more attractive by the minute.

At that time, I was in the Old Port Marina in the centre of Brest, squeezed between the commercial and the military ports. This marina has no dry dock, so it couldn't leave Nausikaä there. Pablo suggested going up the estuary from Brest to the Marina *Moulin Blanc*. This marina is three times the size of the one in town, with a secure dry dock, and charging lower rates than the alternative.

Three days later I had arranged room at the Moulin Blanc dry dock and lifted Nausikaä out of the water. All that was left for me to do was the standard winterising maintenance, pack the sails, secure everything on board, and go back to England to hibernate like a hedgehog in its hole.

Touring the Spacetime Continuum

I remember the return trip to the UK was exhausting. Firstly, a taxi ride from Brest to Roscoff, then the overnight ferry from Roscoff to Plymouth, where I did not have a cabin and could not but manage an uneasy and uncomfortable rest curled up like a cat on straight-back seats. Thereafter a 5-hour train ride from Plymouth to Reading, and then another hour train ride from Reading to Bracknell. Almost 24 hours door-to-door.

By the time I walked through the door of my house in Bracknell, I felt like returning from Richard Burton´s expedition to the source of the Nile.

How strange… Nothing had changed in my house, my home. Same smells, same pictures hanging in the same spots on the walls, same overgrown garden as always, same old gadgets that didn´t work still not working. Nothing out of place, nothing in the slightest way unfamiliar.

Yet everything was different. The place was reassuringly the same, and at the same time emotionally alien and distant. Like the lobby of a hotel you use on business trips time after time, month after month. You get to recognise peoples' faces and voices, you know the rhythms and routines, you can point to every dirty and worn spot on the carpet with your eyes closed. Yet it remains the surface of the moon, no-man´s land, a strange place with no strings attached to your heart.

The place had not changed, I had. It´s a very odd feeling, unsettling. It no longer matters if everything is in its place in the house because things' "right place" are the places assigned to them by habit, fancy, or remembrance. They are emotional stimuli and clues leading to other times and places in your life. The wooden spoon wire basket in the kitchen, forever on the right side of the stove, I could have found on the left side of the stove, or inside my sock drawer, without batting an eyelid or suspecting anything was amiss.

That was the first indicator, the loudspeaker announcement that I belonged there no more, that I no longer had a "right place" under that roof and among those walls. My beloved house, which I had over the years, with bare hands and meagre craft, transformed beyond recognition into a reflexion of my (ours, Kaori´s and mine) personality, had morphed into a roofed bus stop. It was the proof, if one was needed, that the road I was on was one-way traffic only.

I had been away for less than two months. What had happened in that time to induce this tectonic plate shift? Whatever it was, there is no way back now Rafa. There´s no returning to your old parameters, your safeguards, your crafty justifications for the life you have, you had. For better or for worse it was time to up sticks, roll the tepee, and head over the hill.

WINTER BY THE FIREPLACE

> And you may find yourself, living in a shotgun shack.
> And you may find yourself, in another part of the world.
> And you may find yourself, behind the wheel of a large automobile.
> And you may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife.
> And you may ask yourself, well…. How did I get here???
> **Taking Heads – Once in a lifetime**

Well then, how did I get here?

One tends to conceive the future the way one looks up a tree. A single trunk forks off into many branches, multiple paths, choices everywhere, a multiplicity of possible futures, none more or less likely than the next, and all barely distinguishable from each other at the top of the canopy.

It was never so in my life though. When I look back, it all feels entirely predictable; chance and serendipity only applying to the anecdotal detail and inconsequential minutiae. It is not a matter of fate. There is no manifest destiny here, no mystic karma. It's a matter of statistics and behavioural patterns. Men and women make their own fate, and with a little knowing of what makes them tick, their paths reveal themselves rather easy to anticipate.

I have now come to a place where I have achieved that bare minimum of insight about what really makes me tick, scant, meagre, and paltry as it surely is, that when I look back, I find myself looking up the tree. I see a multiplicity of pasts that may have been, but only one possible outcome. Perhaps several outcomes that are really only one, like the different view angles on a Picasso nude. Same naked lady though.

So much for existential freedom.

But I seem to be avoiding the question. To the point then, how did I get here? Complex answer to a simple question. I can't assign responsibility to chance, fate, the stars, the gods of Olympus. It is entirely mine and mine alone. The answer also depends on how high up I am prepared to look at the tree. How far back I dare to go.

Far, far back, and very, very high up the tree, I can assign responsibility to reading a handful of books.[1] I can recite by heart passages of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Islands in the Stream*, Steinbeck's *The Log of the Sea of Cortez*, Conrad's *Lord Jim*, and García Marquez´s *One-Hundred Years of Solitude*. Masefield and Longfellow were also there of course, and way up, past the tree and just below the top of the clouds, were also Verne, Stevenson, Tomás Salvador, Salgari.

But the thing that did it, that gelled the -whatever it was- into something identifiable and achievable, was reading the adventures of Robin Lee Graham on the *Dove*. Not a great literary work, to be sure, but who cares? There it was, and it was not fiction. This was something real; it could be done and lived! And why the hell wasn't I the one to live it? Answer me that!

Then came Joshua Slocum and Vito Dumas, Francis Chichester, Knox-Johnston, Thor Heyerdhal, Jacques Cousteau, Laurence van der Post, Hans Haas and Santiago Genovés.

[1] Also, to listening, over and over, to a few albums while I was reading those books, so as to imprint the written word indelibly in my consciousness and memory with the dye of music: Dylan, Carole King, Carly Simon, CS&N, America, Pink Floyd.

Those stories tilled the ground of my imagination. They were the worm in the bottle of mezcal. Once you swallow it, there's not going back, and nothing will ever be the same.

After that came adulthood, and professional career, and marriage and mortgages, all shaped as acceptable and desirable ambitions, intermediate goals on the road to somewhere great. All very good, very worthy, admirable pursuits.

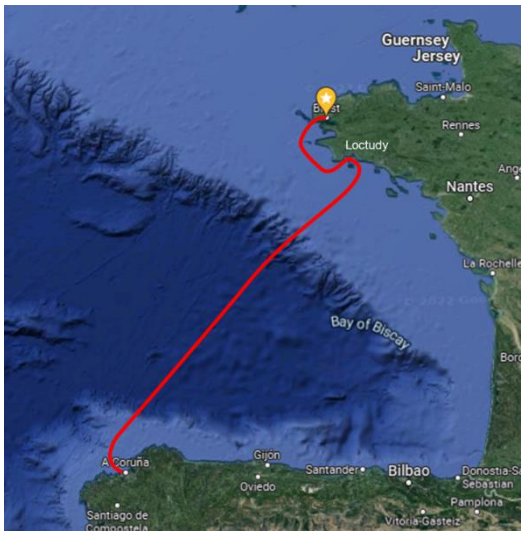
Yet, looking back today, for all their undisputed worthiness and intrinsic virtue and value, few of those admirable grown-up worldly pursuits, ever quite had the inherent presence of my imagination, the overwhelming allure of Robin Lee Graham's account of the South Pacific crossing, or the unbearable yearning to be there, with Francis Chichester rounding the Cape of Good Hope, with Phillipe and Falco, diving the *Thistlegorm* for the first time since WWII. Fancy that…

Well, we are where we are. But where is that, precisely? Where, precisely, is "here"?

At the most basic level, "here" is my study in my house in Bracknell, this computer, and rucksacks, boxes, bags, and tie-ups of stuff all over, ready to be loaded in the car. A house of 20 years soon to be abandoned and sold, a country that was my kind host for over 20 years but never quite became "home", and a laborious journey next week by ferry and road to Brest in the French Bretagne, in the middle of the C19 pandemic. That's where Nausikaä is. There, the wind rose only points South. That's the gateway to the alluring reality of my imagination. The journey has already begun, and I can't wait to get going!

And BTW, I did make it to dive the *Thistlegorm*, and in the best possible company. Notch in the tally!

CROSSING THE BAY OF BISCAY – 340 NM



The Boring Part of Sailing

Biscay is one of those places full of nautical ghosts, real and imagined, like the Cape of Good Hope, the Northwest Passage, or Cape Horn, and whose crossing deserves careful preparation with reliable info. In other words, it can't be approached as a leisurely Sunday outing.

I believe it was close to three months, the time spent researching and planning the crossing of the gulf. This included the detailed study of all the cruising guides, tide atlases, and pilot books of the European Atlantic front that I was able to consult, conversations with other sailors with first-hand experience in this voyage, and literally hundreds of hours surfing the internet looking for pertinent information on weather conditions, currents, waves, estimated passage times, etc.

My friend Patrick Layne (who contributes on YouTube with his solo sailing experiences, and whose opinion I respect enormously) advised me this way: *The secret Rafa*, he said, *is to select the best opportunity available from a meteorological point of view*. Patrick is based in La Rochelle, France. The waters of the gulf are his backyard, and as a local in that part of the world, his was an observation to be mindful of.

This notwithstanding, after extensive research, all I could come up with was: First, the weather is unpredictable; It can blow a gale coming from nowhere with equal probability as of finding dead clam for several days in a row. Second, each sailor has his or her own opinion about the difficulties and challenges inherent in this voyage, often contradictory with each other, and often inapplicable to the sailing characteristics of Nausikaä.

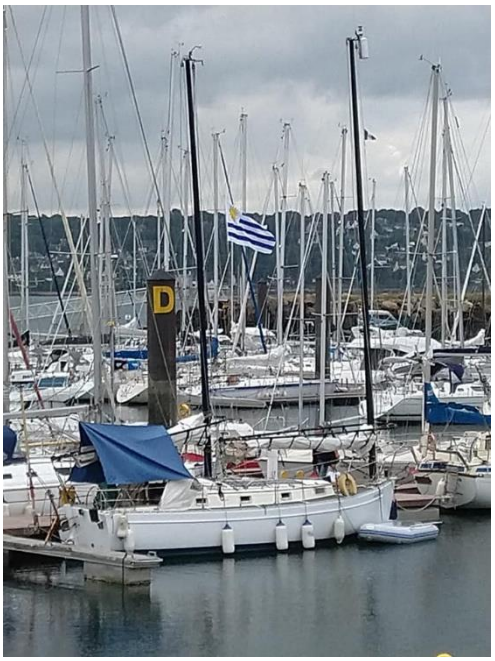
Back to square one. The wind is the wind, and any weather forecast more than three days old is as reliable as none at all. Any plan of mine therefore had to be based on other factors: distances, estimated average speeds of Nausikaä, and the availability of easily accessible ports *en route*.

Now, the minimum distance from Brest in Brittany where I was, to the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula (A Coruña), is about 340 nautical miles, about 640 km as the crow flies. At an average speed of 4.5 knots it represents just over three days sailing. But straight lines do not exist in the ocean, so my calculation was for a 4 day passage as a baseline. I don't have satellite telephony or Navtex, so I couldn't update the weather forecast once under way, and these four days already exceeded the limit of reliability of any weather report I could start with.

Besides, at a smaller scale, it is prudent to factor in possible obstacles (fishing gear, exclusion areas, coastal traffic, etc.), tides, currents, safety margins of this and that, and the possibility of equipment failure, all of which pushed the baseline of the plan to a total of 5 estimated days sailing door-to-door. Clearly, the crossing of the gulf had to be done in stages with at least one intermediate landfall. I wasn't in a hurry and sightseeing was a key factor in the appeal of the entire expedition.

From Brest, two stages were evident and represented different challenges: First, to go around the tip of Brittany, a coastal passage, subject to tidal currents that can reach 7 knots, and that run in opposite directions every 6 hours. Second: the crossing of the Gulf proper, a blue water crossing not greatly influenced by tides, but by the average speeds that I could achieve in Nausikaä.

This is so because the possible ports of arrival in Galicia are mostly narrow estuaries and with strong tidal currents. Consequently, access is possible (or recommended) only during the hours of flood tide, when sailing is done with the current and not against it, and when the tide provides sufficient draft to negotiate rocky reefs and sand bars. It was therefore necessary to estimate the time of arrival with an accuracy of less than six hours.



Nausikaä at the Moulin Blanc marina in Brest

Joanna at the Helm in Brest

Preparations and More Preparations

I returned to Brest from the UK in mid-May, having allotted a month of time to prepare Nausikaä for the crossing, to allow Joanna to become familiar with the boat and its rigging, and for both of us to develop the dynamics and routines of a well-integrated crew.

The second was fundamental. We had never sailed together, and blue water crossings are not an appropriate occasion to have disagreements or misunderstandings among the crew. We had to turn ourselves into a good team and gain mutual confidence in our individual talents and abilities before we put to sea. I thought the bay of Brest would be the ideal place to do just that. My intuition was correct, it was!

At this point, I must introduce Joanna Wendrychowicsz to all readers. Joanna joined this crazy adventure in March 2020, as First Officer, Commodore of the expedition, part-time helmswoman, and cabin boy of Nausikaä.

Courageous woman! considering she was joining the company of an inveterate lone sailor, with the unenviable expectation of having to teach new tricks to an old dog. Hence the need to have sufficient time and opportunity for both of us to crystallize into an effective and efficient crew before departing Brest.

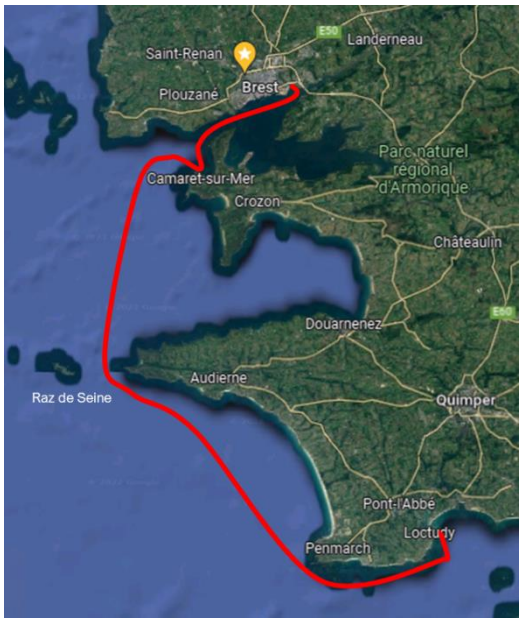
At the peak of the second wave of Covid, those days did not offer many opportunities for recreation, even though Brest is a very attractive city, and the surroundings are really beautiful. But we did manage to do everything we could to prepare Nausikaä for Biscay, and whatever awaited us beyond.

Brest is well suited to that sort of thing. The *Moulin Blanc* marina, upstream from the city of Brest, provided adequate technical services and infrastructure to meet most of our needs, and the marina staff was always very courteous, helpful, and flexible.

Once the operability of all the systems and equipment on board had been checked, all the supplies stowed, tides and winds estimated, and the navigation plan determined in stages, we finally set the big day of departure for June 16th.

The last entry on my to-do list that day was, "make appropriate offerings and sacrifices to Poseidon". It was not feasible for Joanna and me to drown a horse in sacrifice, as the ancient Greeks would have done, so we toasted the health of the bearded big man with the trident with a little French champagne poured into the water and begged his indulgence.

Brest to Loctudy – 60 NM



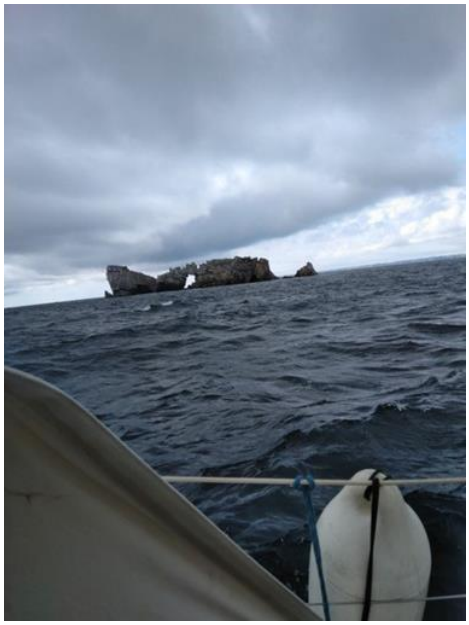
We left the Moulin Blanc marina shortly after noon on June 16th, well into the ebbing tide, for the jump to *Camaret-sur-Mer*, at the southern entrance of the bay of Brest. A short trip - about three hours - and an uncomfortable one, with variable north-westerly winds and squalls, arriving in Camaret at 16:00, cold and soaked to the bone.

The choice of the port of departure was suggested by a good friend from Brest, Jean-Pierre Clec'h. Jean-Pierre is a delightful character! A Breton (he doesn't consider himself "French") with an enviable knowledge of the waters and local conditions, and a sense of humour even more so.

Camaret-sur-Mer was the best starting point for going around the western tip of Brittany: it was easy to enter and exit and allowed an optimal use of the tidal currents to go through the *Raz de Sein*, about 30 miles further south.

The Raz de Seine is a channel about four miles wide between the mainland coast of Brittany and the *Île de Seine*. The Raz passage presents challenges in the multitude of submerged rocky reefs that plague the area, and in the tidal currents that can run in unforeseen directions among the shoals. In short, while crossing it you must pay close attention to the plotter, the depth gauge, and the direction of the wind.

The best time to reach the northern end of the *Raz* on spring tides sailing south is about two hours before low tide, when the water is still moving in the right direction, but not so strongly as to generate dangerous eddies and counter currents in the confetti of islets and submerged rocks that exist between the mainland and Île de Seine. Even in tides with modest coefficient, the current moves at 7 knots, producing breakers over the shoals.



Going through the Toulinget channel to starboard. Like that boulder there are several in the space of two miles

As plotted originally, the route took us around *Cap Touliguet* in a south-westerly direction along the *Canal du Petit Leac'h*. On the nautical chart it seemed reasonable and easy: straight line sailing through an almost three miles wide channel, in the exact direction of the tidal current according to the tide atlas, and with an average of 20 meters of water under the keel. Enough space to tack in case the wind didn't cooperate fully.

In sharing this route with Jean-Pierre, he frowned and shook his head. *No,* he said, *use the Toulinguet channel*.

Toulinguet (same name as the Cape) is a coastal channel, half a mile wide and 12 meters deep on average, that requires a dog leg changed of course to head towards the Raz upon exiting the channel. The suggestion was counterintuitive.

When I queried the logic of this, Jean-Pierre shook his head again. *I've never gone south that way*, he said. *I don't know anyone who has. Use Toulinguet*! he repeated sternly. I've learned to my benefit not to ignore lightly the opinion of locals, so I considered that pearl of wisdom as gospel, and reworked my pilot plan accordingly.

The plan called for an early departure from Camaret at 05:00 hours with the change of the tide. I got up at 03:30 to make a pot of coffee, and with sleepy eyes I climbed up Nausikaä´s cockpit and stepped into a gentle rain and a thick fog. I was inside bowl of pea soup!

Mmmmm.... Nah! Forget it! I will follow your advice always Jean-Pierre, but not in the dark and in these conditions, through a channel half a mile wide with rocks like teeth sticking out of the water on either side. There will be other tides. Back to bed!

We departed Camaret-sur-Mer that afternoon at 15:30 with the following tide. The wind had changed from early in the morning and was now blowing from the southwest, so we crept slowly and laboriously westward, with both sails taut as drum skins, and at the limit of what Nausikaä can do upwind and still move forward.

Toulinget channel to port

The main objective was to reach the northern entrance of the Raz de Sein between one and two hours before low tide. I vividly recalled seeing photographs of huge waves crashing at the base of the *La Veille* lighthouse in front of the Pointe du Raz and I didn't want to spend more time than strictly necessary in that vicinity.

The "fangs" of Pen Hir on the horizon

However, leaving with the afternoon tide meant that we could no longer reach Loctudy in daylight: after midnight was my most optimistic expectation. Although access to Loctudy is not difficult, it is still a tidal river mouth, with a channel about 30 meters wide in the narrowest part, and with rocky shoals all around.

Leaving the Toulinguet channel behind we headed south towards the "fangs" of *Pen-Hir*. This is a line of rocky islets that extends southwest off the *Pointe de Pen-Hir*. There are five triangular islets (hence "fangs") out to sea from the cape, looking rather intimidating. The real danger, however, is in the twelve or so reefs beyond, barely submerged, and spaced every three or four hundred yards for another 5 miles.

Once clear of Pen-Hir, we made the passage to the Raz with 12 knots on the beam, arriving a little earlier than planned. The Raz de Sein transit offers spectacular landscapes. Unfortunately, with the sky very cloudy and twilight approaching, Joanna and I were concentrating on steering Nausikaä, which on that coast and even in ideal conditions, is still a challenge.

Past the Raz, and at the lee of the cape, the wind slowed down to about 8 true knots, about 5 knots apparent. Now we had the wind and sea astern. Nausikaä doesn't settle in those conditions; with the sea above 125 degrees from the bow, and without enough wind to really fill the sails. We tried several options. With both sails on the same side, the mizzen casted so much shadow on the main one that the main ran out of air. Gull-winging and with the swell directly astern, the mizzen boom simply wouldn't stay put. Finally, tired of adjusting sail in the light breeze, I abated the mizzen completely and ran only with the mainsail. I'm not supposed to do this in Nausikaä, but what the heck!

The La Veille, lighthouse at the Pointe du Raz

Two hours after clearing the Raz and with night upon us, Joanna and I looked at each other wondering what to do. The prospect of entering Loctudy in the dark and navigating by instruments was not very appealing to either of us. In the moonlight, and still 15 miles from Loctudy, we decided it was time to invoke Plan B, so we headed for the bay of *Audierne*, our designated "refuge."

We arrived in less than an hour, picked up a vacant buoy off *St Evette* among half a dozen other boats presumably also on their way to somewhere else, and treated ourselves to a hot dinner, a bottle of wine, and a whole night rest. That day we had cleared the French *Finistère*! Maybe it wasn't a huge accomplishment, but I was glad to put it behind me.

The following day, sunny and cloudless, we set sail from St Evette at 14:30, arriving in Loctudy at 19:00 just before high tide, with 12 knots on the beam all the way there. A delightful sailing day!

Crossing the Gulf – 310 NM

We stayed in Loctudy longer than anticipated or desired, pinned down by a strong south-westerly blowing across the Gulf.

I'm not complaining! Loctudy is a beautiful spot. There are sprawling salt marshes at the mouth of the river, beautiful beaches on the bay, and Loctudy itself is a charming, sleepy 19th-century seaside resort with airs of provincial exclusivity. We explored the marshes on the dinghy and the village on bikes loaned by the marina.

But we were at the beginning of our journey and wanted to make way.

The "right weather window" about which Patrick Layne warned me was, as far as I could tell, a high-pressure system moving slowly and steadily north and east along the Atlantic coast of Iberia. It was a bulge of the permanent Azores High system, that meandered eastward into Biscay.

These conditions should give us moderate northerlies during the first day and a half of the crossing from France, veering northwest two days later and for the remainder of the voyage to Spain. Most of the predictive models agreed on that picture over the same time period. If the prediction held, we should have a 10 to 15 knots breeze on the beam all the way, and clear skies day and night. In paper these were ideal conditions for Nausikaä. Can't ask for more!

I hoped for a three-days (two-nights) passage to *Viveiro*, on the north coast of Galicia. Our "refuge" was *Ribadeo*, another small estuary about 20 NM to the east along the coast. There wasn't much to choose between those two; Both small "*Rias*" with narrow entrances, both difficult to negotiate at low tide and/or with strong winds from land, and at the same distance from the point on the chart where we had to make a decision. But Ribadeo may give us a better angle to the wind on the third day. As said, all this on paper.

In planning the Biscay crossing I had ruled out sailing directly to A Coruña, although A Coruña is the most popular and frequented destination for this crossing. The same anticyclone that gave us those moderate northerlies in the middle of the Bay of Biscay, also increased the Portuguese trade winds. As the centre of the anticyclone approaches the continent, it wrinkles the isobars close together against the northwest coast of the Iberian Peninsula, generating a pressure gradient that produces winds force 8 on the Beaufort scale and waves in direct proportion.

THE ADVANTAGE OF HAVING A PLAN B

While I was doing the chart work to adapt our route to Jean-Pierre's recommendations, I decided to select and include a "refuge" in my pilot plan.

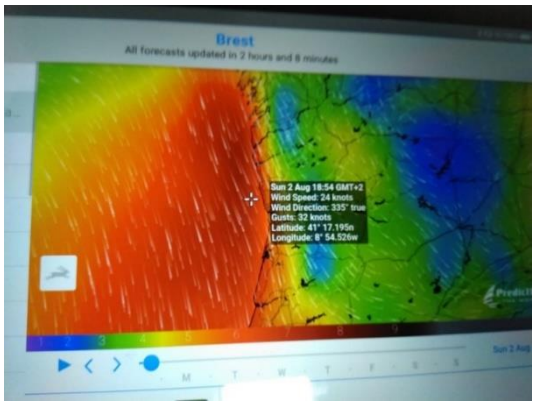
This practice became a habit throughout the subsequent journey to Torrevieja. As far as possible, I would always include an alternate landfall between any two given points along the route 60 NM or more apart.

I admit that yes, it makes for additional effort to the chart work prior to any sailing, but it also has several important advantages.

First, it is a backup plan in case of unexpected weather changes or technical failures with the gear, without having to undo the progress made so far by returning to the point of departure.

Secondly, the route is already planned. When the decision must be made to seek shelter from the wind, or simply to cope with fatigue, it is not the time to consult pilot books or do chart work. One is prone to making mistakes in those circumstances. When invoking Plan B, one already knows what to do and is familiar with what to expect.

This practice paid dividends more than once throughout the trip.



The Portuguese Trades. Everything in red is too much wind!

Galicians call the stretch of coast between Capes *Ortegal* and *Finisterre*, the *Costa da Morte*; the "Coast of Death". The prospect of attempting the crossing with those winds and with the "coast of death" to leeward, made me weigh the available options very carefully. Hence the choice of Viveiro as landfall out of Biscay.

As soon as the wind settled from the north, on the 26th, we left Loctudy at 06:00 on a course of 210 degrees on the compass.

On that course, off Loctudy, the continental shelf is about 65 miles wide, up to the 200 meters isobath, and then the bottom drops off on a steep incline to about 3000 meters in the horizontal space of 30 miles. All the cruising guides and pilot books I had read pointed out that those miles of the continental slope can become "bumpy" when the long-period oceanic waves hit the continental slope. My intention was to make it past that point before nightfall on the 26th.

The dolphin watcher

We had a fantastic sailing that day until 18:00. A large pod of oceanic dolphins followed us intermittently for much of the day. With Joanna at the helm, I sat astride the bow leaning over the bowsprit, and spent long minutes absorbed in watching their shenanigans in the bow wake. It is evident that they ***know*** that they are being observed. One particular individual would repeatedly jump in the wake and then turn slightly on its side just below the surface, looking at me and making sure I was watching! Absolutely magical!

Sunset in Biscay

About six o'clock in the evening the wind died down to almost nothing. *Mmmm*... this wasn't in the forecast! Well, maybe it'll show up later. Let's leave behind the bumpy miles of the continental slope, and then we'll see. So I started the engine and revved for 4.5 knots, our planned average speed, remembering that we had a rendezvous with the tide on the other side on the Spanish coast.

Against any prediction (or perhaps, predictably unpredictable), the wind remained dead for the next two days. The 30 bumpy miles from the continental slope were as calm and well-mannered as the 150 miles that followed; absolute dead calm, the sea oily and reflective like a mirror, and huge, long ocean waves that lifted Nausikaä gently and posed her down again like a toy duck in a bathtub.

Chugchugchugchug for 36 hours on autopilot.

What I remember best: the most spectacular and stunningly beautiful sunsets and sunrises I've ever seen, on land or at sea. Dolphins everywhere and at all hours, and some whales! Overwhelmingly

clear night skies. Good hot cooked dinners: the boat barely rolling. A completely empty sea: no ships sighted during the day, no lights on the horizon at night. The only annoyance was the muffled grunt of the engine, but even this soon becomes part of the background noise of the world.

In the afternoon of the second day, this dead-calm-in-the-middle-of-the-ocean thing was getting a little boring, and I was wondering how I managed to miss Patrick Layne's *right weather window* so badly. What happened to the 10 to 15 knots on the beam that all the weather models promised me?

¡Oh dear… what a hard time I´m having!

I remembered then that, in Brest, toasting Poseidon´s good health, I had wished aloud for an easy crossing through Biscay.

Be careful what you ask of the gods...!

Also, I honestly didn't know for sure if I had enough fuel on board to cover all the miles to Viveiro on the engine. I had simply never considered that scenario in my plans.

At that moment we spotted a freighter on the horizon. Since my weather forecast was already three days old, I put a DSC call on the VHF to the freighter and asked for an updated weather report. Very kindly, the freighter obliged cryptically: "more of the same over the next two days."

It was then that Joanna and I decided to change course south and set sail for *Gijón*. Gijón was not included in the plans, nor was it a "refuge", but to the dead calm of the previous two days, I feared contrary winds would follow. I couldn't trust my weather report from three days ago (which was also incorrect!), and I didn't trust the update received from the freighter *en route* either. We were about 110 miles off the Spanish coast. Gijón would save us about 40 miles to landfall and, at 5 knots on average, we could make the distance by lunchtime the following day. Whatever may happen to the weather, it was much easier to enter Gijón than Viveiro or Ribadeo, as it is a large commercial port free of obstacles and tidal currents, and open in all weather conditions.

Late in the afternoon, the sky darkened, and we entered a thick fog bank, still becalmed. It was time to switch on the radar. And a good thing we did too, because for several miles I had to dribble between tuna nets that appeared in my path in the middle of the night and with very poor visibility.

The breeze finally picked up from the west at dawn, around 12 knots with gusts of 15 to 18, requiring a deep reef in the mizzen. The breeze blew away the fog but also brought squalls from the Cantabrian mountains ahead of us, forcing us to reef both sails on and off several times on the way to Gijón.

Exhilarating sailing! Joanna was at the helm and really put Nausikaä to the test, clocking over 7 knots on the water occasionally, but maintaining a constant speed of 6 knots most of the time. Considering that Nausikaä is more tortoise than hare (the theoretical hull speed is 6.2 knots) maintaining a constant cruising speed of 6 knots with the wind ahead of the beam is something quite good indeed!

We arrived in Gijón in the late afternoon and the marina office, about to close for the night, assigned us a berth in the outer port. Once tied up and with a cold beer in our hands, Joanna and I reviewed our decision to change course when we did. Were we too cautious? Time would tell. And so it did!

That night, the wind picked up from the west at 25 knots, with gusts of 30, and remained so for several days. Never mind! We won! We had crossed Biscay! Hooray!!!!

Gijón to a A Coruña - 155 NM

It's always thus! Gijon, where we had no intention of coming, turned out to be one of the most memorable places of the entire journey, and the best initiation into Spain we could have wished for.

The morning after our arrival, the wind picked up from the west with gusts of 30 knots. At the end of that day, it was still blowing relentlessly in the same direction. The weather forecast predicted several days of this.

I'm getting a bit long in the tooth to sail close hauled and tacking for 16 hours all the way to Ribadeo (our next landfall), with the coast to our lee, showers, and a swell that, even in ideal conditions, can turn the stomach of the most seasoned sailor.

Fate had brought us to Gijón. It would have been impolite to whoever holds the reins of human destiny not to take advantage of the opportunity to get to know the city and, is possible, do a little tourism in the shire.

Gijón's marina is in the old part of town, where the artisanal fishing harbour was located in the pre-industrial era. It was an ideal location for us, as it allowed us access on foot to the entire city. We also arrived at the right time... the cider festival!

Gijón

The central part of the city is surprising, with attractive nineteenth-century architecture surrounding medieval squares and buildings and the beautiful promenade of San Lorenzo beach, but also with an eclectic mix of styles that in the space of twenty paces transits from the horrific to the sublime (the horrific being generally the most recent), especially in the streets near the old fishing harbour. The city has the charm of a traditional nineteenth-century northern European seaside resort, which has acceded modernity left to its own devises.

Despite the restrictions imposed by the Covid epidemic, the streets were overflowing, especially after sunset. Taverns, wine cellars and restaurants everywhere!

It was a pleasure to introduce Joanna to the traditional Spanish cuisine that the northern mass tourist doesn't eat, i.e. everything that isn't tapas, potato tortilla, and paella.

*We tried (how could we not!) the traditional artisanal cider, which neither of us liked, so we settled for white wines from the shire to wash down shellfish, grilled sardines, cod, tuna bellies, even the inevitable **fabes**.*

As an introduction to Spanish gastronomy, Asturias offered us some great hors d'oeuvres.

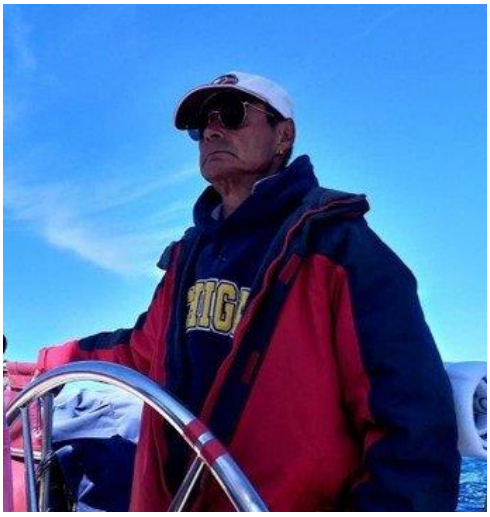
Gijón is a very beautiful city, framed by the Cantabrian mountains and the sea, with friendly people, delicious cuisine, and a pleasant marina, with reasonable prices and attended by courteous and helpful staff. However, as charming as the place was, time passed and we had to make way.

A two-day breather from the relentless westerly winds gave us the opportunity. But we had to hurry! Towards the end of the week, the weather would close in again, so that the next two days might well be the last chance we had to sail west for as many weeks.

The plan was therefore to leave before dawn on the morning of Friday, July 3rd, with a light and variable breeze during the morning, but settling from the northeast in the afternoon. This time we did not offer sacrifices to any god, be it Greek or Asturian!

The following day we left through the port entrance at 06:30 with drizzle and a light breeze, but with a northwest swell of near two meters. It was the hangover from the gale of the previous days. We rounded *Cabo Peñas* on the engine and then set course due west, with our hand on the wheel all the time.

Views of Gijón´s beachfront



Very serious at the helm

It's a mannerism of this boat. With a steep swell in the hind quarter (say 120 to 150 degrees off the bow) and the wind on the beam or stern, Nausikaa tends to zigzag when the crest of the wave passes under the keel. As soon as the wave hits the rudder blade, say from starboard, her ass lifts and the boat tilts to port on the forward side of the wave. As the crest of the wave passes beneath the keel a second later, the boat does the exact opposite, pitching to starboard on the back face of the wave.

It takes practice to maintain a steady course in these conditions, and uninterrupted attention to the motion of the sea. I've found that anticipating this pattern and giving a little counter rudder just before the crest of the wave hits the stern helps maintain a straight course. The key is not to overdo it by trying to correct after the fact. But you can't relax! A light hand on the wheel and feet set apart and well planted, it's impossible to steer sitting down. You lose focus for a second and find yourself with the wind in your nose in no time!

The stretch of coastline between Gijón and Ribadeo is flanked with massive rocky cliffs, between two and three hundred metres high. Large outcrops of bare granite that plunge into the sea, crowned by pine forests to which led-coloured rain clouds with sticky fingers cling stubbornly.

Rounding Cape Peñas

We made good progress to *Navia*, two-thirds of the way to Ribadeo. The sky had cleared, but the wind also subsided, so we had to motorsail the rest of the way. We couldn't delay! We had an appointment with the tide to enter the Ribadeo estuary.

We arrived in Ribadeo at dusk tired and happy to be in a sheltered harbour after a pleasant day of sailing.

CRUISING GALICIA´S *RIAS*

The stretch of coastline between *Cabo Ortegal* (the northernmost tip of Galicia) and the entrance to the *Ría de Muros* (south of *Finisterre*) is known locally as the *Costa da Morte*, the “Coast of Death”. The name is not unwarranted. It's an unforgiving coastline; steep rocky cliffs and hundreds of islets and semi-submerged reefs where the Atlantic Ocean breaks with all its might against continental Europe. There isn't even a continental shelf of note to absorbs wave energy and make things a little easier for the coastal sailor.

Before leaving Brest in France, I had planned our course to Ribeiro in Spain, but no further. At the time, I suspected that I didn't have enough knowledge of the local conditions, and I didn't feel confident that I would do competent chart work beyond Ribadeo.

Nausikaä at the marina in Ribadeo

Fortunately, we had the invaluable assistance of Alfredo Rodríguez Nuño. Alfredo is a native of A Coruña who has spent his summers in Ribadeo since childhood, a sailor and knowledgeable of Galician waters like no other. Attracted by the unusual appearance of Nausikaä's rig, Alfredo came to visit us the day after our arrival in Ribadeo.

At anchor in a bend of the Ribadeo *Ria*, and under a persistent drizzle, with a few bottles of homemade Albariño wine that he brought from his *pazo*, we sat in Nausikaä's cabin to discuss the route south, select anchorages, ports and marinas, places to visit, delicacies of Galician cuisine that, not by any conceivable means! we could leave without savouring, and to define in general terms the route to *Baiona*, near the border with Portugal.

Ribadeo from the Asturian side of the estuary

The Rías Bajas are easy he said. *A stroll in the park! It's the Rías Altas and the Costa da Morte that you must pay attention to!*

Thus, with Alfredo's invaluable help, we divided the overall passage into three sectors: (1) Ribadeo to Coruña, (2) Coruña to *Muros*, and then, (3) the "easy" sector through the *Rías Bajas*, *Muros* to *Baiona*. About 250 NM in total, not counting the miles of general exploration and touristic detours in the *Rías*. By the end of the third bottle of Alvariño, I had all the waypoints defined in OCPN and loaded onto the plotter, and

I had written the pilot plans for the three sectors in my logbook.

A Coruña was an obligatory port of call. It's a beautiful city well worth a visit, but more pertinently, Nausikaa's autopilot had failed intermittently on the way to Ribadeo. I suspected that the drive belt had stretched and was about to break. Finding a replacement belt for an old Autohelm 4000 wasn't going to be easy at the best of times, and impossible in a small fishing village in the middle of nowhere, so Coruña, a big city, was the right place to get a spare one.

Baiona, a few miles from the Portuguese border, was also an obligatory stopover to stock Nausikaä with water, fuel and supplies, and to make last-minute repairs and maintenance before leaving Spain.

First lunch in Ribadeo

Gastronomic Adventure

The Ribadeo *Ría* is the border between the regions of Asturias and Galicia. During our stay in Gijón we had enjoyed, at affordable prices, an excellent traditional cuisine. Not so during our stay in France, where if you want to eat well you must empty your wallet.

Therefore, from the moment we entered Spain I set out to make this trip a gastronomic adventure as much as a nautical one, for my own pleasure, of course, but also for the benefit of my travelling companion. It was a delight in and of itself to see the expression in Joanna's face to the delicacies the waiters put in front of her for lunch or dinner. Even for an educated and experienced traveller like her, everything was exotic. Flavors, textures, and modes were transformed into a perceptual adventure the instant of sitting down at the table.

In Gijón, we savoured the highlights of Asturian coastal cuisine. Now it was Galicia's turn. And what a turn! Ribadeo gave us the opportunity to get into matters. Our first lunch in Ribadeo the day after we arrived consisted of octopus *a feira*, grilled sardines, fried razor clams, all washed down by a *Ribeiro* served in *conquiñas*.

Dinner that day, if I remember correctly, was *caldo galego* (a traditional local soup akin to borsch) and *choubas* pie (made with tiny herring fished inside the *Ría*). On our cruise of the Galician *Rias*, it was followed by crabs, scallops, clams, barnacles, mussels prepared in eight different ways, marinated dogfish, *Padrón* peppers, traditional stews, *empanadas*, smoked pork shoulder, black pudding, sweet blood sausages, *raxo*, cheeses...

To the point that, sometimes, we deviated from our planned route and delayed the departure more than once, simply to experience some culinary wonder from here or there. This pattern was maintained for the rest of the voyage through Portugal and the Andalusian Mediterranean to Torrevieja. And all it took to put it into practice was to find out minimally, on arrival at any port, about the characteristics of the local cuisine and cellar. That, and to make the effort to finding the right place to taste them, without falling into the laziness of the tapas bar, the pizzeria, or the Italian ristorante closest to the pier. When we wanted pasta, I could make it better than anyone in Nausikaä's galley!

An enjoyment well worth the effort, during this trip, and as a rule for life!

Ribadeo to Coruña – 90 NM

Ribadeo gave us shelter from contrary winds for several days. The town is a gem, with steep cobbled streets and stone houses with glazed overhanging balconies. A place to explore at leisure and on foot.

Views of Ribadeo

It was a great pity that Covid haunted us. The day after arriving two cases were diagnosed in the town and the municipality ordered preventive measures against contagion, so that all activities that involved groups of people: bars, restaurants, markets, museums, and tourist visits to places of interest, etc., were severely restricted. Still, the place was more than worth the inconvenience!

We departed Ribadeo with the ebb tide of July 9th for the crossing to Coruña, approximately 90 miles. About 20 hours of sailing in ideal conditions, and one night rounding Cape *Ortegal*, the northernmost tip of Galicia. The planned course called for sailing offshore by about 4 miles in the vicinity of the cape. This added miles to the total journey, but I wanted to have ample wiggle room on this leg of the trip in case the forecasted wind decided to change its mind.

The meteorological models promised clear skies and an average northeasterly of 10 to 12 knots, veering progressively to the northwest overnight. That would give us a breeze on the starboard side the whole passage. The important thing was to round Cape *Ortegal* during the night before the wind shifted to the NW. Our designated refuge was *Cedeira*, about 30 miles before reaching Coruña.

This scenario was promising, but short-lived; 72 hours at most, after which we would have a weather front approaching rapidly from the middle of the Atlantic.

We left Ribeiro early in the morning with a moderate breeze from the NE, and made good progress towards Ortegal during the day, leaving the Viveiro estuary to port early afternoon. At four o'clock we had passed Cape *Bares* and had the *Ortigueira* estuary on our port side. This was the point of no return. From then on, we had no refuge on the “Coast of Death” until we reached *Cedeira*, and it was no longer feasible to turn back: Come what may we had to continue to our destination.

Around 19:00, with Cape *Ortegal* on the horizon, the breeze from the NE subsided almost to nothing. I expected it to veer NW, as the models anticipated, not to disappear completely. We had made good progress, and the sea was reasonably calm. We decided then to start the engine to maintain the 4.5 knots average speed and get a little closer to the coast to save a few miles. We would have an almost full moon at night, clear skies, and good visibility. Why doing more miles than necessary? At the change of watch at 8:00 p.m. (we did 2-hour watches), I put a reef on each sail,

This simply as a precaution. Besides, whilst there was no useful breeze, there was no need for more sail.

The passage of Cape Ortegal was made according to plan, motorsailing, in good conditions and without incident. I turned on the radar several times during the night without detecting traffic, fishing nets, or other obstacles in front of us.

By dawn the next day, and about 10 miles southwest of Cape Ortegal, the scenery had changed. Cirrus clouds high up, like shreds of cotton wool and cat scratches, populated the northern sky. Johanna didn't think much of them, but I knew that behind those clouds was the predicted storm front that shouldn't come, at least, for another 24 hours!

The wind then picked up variable from the N-NE, increasing in intensity over the morning and generating a swell of one and a half meters. By early afternoon we were sailing at in 18 knots, with gusts of more than 20, and I was beginning to doubt that we would be able to reach Coruña before the storm.

The topography of the coast made things more difficult for us. It is a very rugged coast, with deep, narrow valleys that run from NE to SW, and that funnel the wind from land. As long as we were in the relative shelter of the cliffs, we had no major problems, but as we traversed the track of the valleys, we encountered gusts of 25 knots or more. This made it impossible to maintain a constant configuration of the sails.

Once again, it was time to invoke Plan B, so we headed for Cedeira. The Cedeira *Ria* is a small, enclosed bay that offers good protection from the waves, with a safe anchorage, and of relatively easy access.

We came into in Cedeira like a bat out of hell, with 18 knots squarely on the stern, and tied up to a vacant buoy about 150 meters from the old pier, in 5 meters of water. Everything had to be done very quickly, as the storm seemed to be closing in on us, even though the sky was still clear. Johanna and I scoured Nausikaä to pack the sails and secure whatever was loose on deck and rigging. We were tired, after a night without proper rest the day before, and some demanding sailing that day.

Sunset in Cedeira the afternoon of our arrival

Despite being in a sheltered place, I still proposed to Joanna to keep watches. I had no idea whom our mooring belonged to, or how well maintained and safe it was. I didn't want to wake up in the middle of the night after breaking moorings and with the boat adrift. With those winds and in the cramped quarters of the Ría, the rocks were only a few minutes away. That night, my anemometer showed 30 knots in the protection of the estuary. I didn't want to imagine what it would be like outside!

When we arrived at Cedeira there were about half a dozen sailboats at the anchorage. In the course of the afternoon and evening, a dozen more entered the estuary, so that the next morning we were surrounded. It was clear that we had not been the only ones to be surprised by the wind.

The sky cleared up completely the next day but the wind did not abate significantly, making it impossible to inflate the dinghy to go ashore. We didn't mind too much staying on board to rest and do other things.

One of the other things we did was to advance about 40 yards ahead of our mooring and drop anchor, which set immediately. As long as I didn´t fully trust my mooring, I trusted my ground tackle more. Anyway, we put a safety line on the buoy to cover eventualities.

At anchor in the protection of the Cedeira Ria. Even so, the anemometer reads 30 knots!

Cedeira

Cedeira is a charming little village located at the head of a small estuary with good shelter from the weather, easy access, and of exceptional scenic beauty. That's why it seemed extremely odd to Joanna and me that the site didn't deserve more prominence in popular cruising guides (in my case IMRAY and CA), where Cedeira is mentioned as little more than a convenient refuge from bad weather.

We were in Cedeira for four days, two of them sheltering from inclement winds, but the last two, for the pleasure of the place itself and the tourist possibilities it offers.

Views of Cedeira

One of the most memorable moments of our visit consisted of a chat of a couple of hours that we had with members of a team of archaeology students from the University of Santiago. They were excavating a Celtic hilltop fort (*castro*) on the promontory that gives access to the estuary on its northern bank. One of them gave us a guided tour of the ruins, a fascinating hands-on lesson in ancient history in the field!

The weather forecast of July 13th for the next day announced a light breeze from the N and relatively calm seas, so Joanna and I decided to use the opportunity to make the short jump (30 miles) to A Coruña.

Archaeological site of a castro from the III century BC in Cedeira

We left Cedeira at 08:00 on July 14th, with regret that we could not stay there for a few more days, but there was a long way to go, and Coruña and the *Rías Bajas* promised other wonders. The sailing was pleasant and uneventful, with 12 knots of

wind astern all the way to Coruña, where we moored in the Marina Coruña early in the afternoon under the shelter of the tallest breakwater I´ve ever seen.

A Coruña

Ei Armórica, Cornubia e Cambria
Scotia, Erín, Galicia e a Illa de Man.
Son as sete nacións celtas
fillas do Rei Breogán.

ULTREIA (Traditional)

As badly translated by me:

They are Brittanny, Cornwall and Wales
Scotland, Ireland, Galicia, and the Isle of Man
These are the seven Celtic nations
Daughters of King Breogán.

The Celtic king Breogán and the Tower of Hercules in the background. The statue is modern, but the tower is a Roman construction from the second century, and as it does now, it served then as a lighthouse for mariners.

The Celtic king Breogán is a mythological character who has become a multinational cultural and political symbol. The first documented mention of the name appears in the "*Lebor Gabála Érenn*", a collection of sagas of pseudo-historical content, written in Irish in the eleventh century, which relate the origin of the Irish Celts.

Th story goes that Breogán (or *Bregon* or *Breachdan* in Irish), a direct descendant from Noah, after conquering Iberia with his people, settled in the northwest of the peninsula and founded a city (which the Romans later called *Brigantium* for reasons unrelated to the king's name), and in which he built a tower. From the top of the tower, he sighted a land to the Septentrion. This land would be modern-day Erin or Ireland. Breogán's sons and grandsons sailed out from *Brigantium*, conquered Ireland, and gave rise to the "*Gael*" or Irish Celts.

All of which would be nothing more than a charming fable if it were not for the fact that recent genetic studies of populations in Ireland, part of Great Britain, and northern Spain reveal a common origin at the end of the Neolithic, about 6000 years ago, with the Iberian populations being ancestral, which corroborates the legend.

All this story about Breogán becomes relevant here because months and months earlier, during my forced stay in Guernsey, I met a group of French sailors from *Morlaix* in Brittany, visiting the island for a couple of days. In the cockpit of their boat and over a few beers, I felt a bit like a frog from a different pool. My French is execrable, and they spoke to each other in an incomprehensible language. It certainly wasn't French! They informed me later that they were Bretons and spoke Breton, a Celtic language. I responded by reciting Breogán's stanzas, which in Galicia are part of regional folklore and well known by everyone. Of course, those Bretons didn't understand the verses in Galician, but they recognized the name "Breoghan" ("gh" in Breton sounds like "j" in Spanish).

Ah... What a change of mood! For these Bretons, from being a frog from a different pool I went (by the magic art of the mythical king and by being my mother's son) to being distant kin. Everyone seated around the wheel relaxed as if it were a Sunday after lunch on the courtyard of their house,

and the conversation turned to languages, legends, family history, Celtic music (they knew about Carlos Núñez and Susana Seivane, Spanish bagpipe players), and sense of humour.

There must be some – so far unidentified – gene that codifies for being Celtic because I have noticed, in many different ways and styles and at different times, among Irish, Welsh, Breton, Asturian and Galician people, a comparable tendency to identify with this "celticity" attribute, in whichever manner it is defined, although as individuals they have little or nothing in common with each other.

Never mind that "Celtic" is not a justifiable name for a historical origin, ethnicity, or cultural unit. The *Keltoi* of Strabo and Herodotus represented nothing more than a collection of all the poor wretches who lived scattered where the map ended. Well, for them all that is irrelevant. *Ça ne s'explique pas*! Jean-Pierre Clec'h said to me in Brest, in answer to my question as to why he defined himself as a Breton Celt and not a Frenchman. I can only attribute it to a biological cause.

María Pita town square in the centre of Coruña. This is the Town Hall, a beautiful eighteenth-century building.

Finally it happened the day after arriving in Coruña. The autopilot, which had been failing intermittently since Gijón, gave up the ghost for good. I disassembled the unit attached to the wheel and found that the drive belt had indeed stretched and was inoperative. My Autohelm 4000 is antediluvian and none of the nautical suppliers in Coruña had spare parts. A new Raymarine SPX5 model, same design but several generations of technology more modern, would set me back over 2,000 euros. That was way over my budget.

The lack of an autopilot didn't stop us from sailing, of course, but it's a piece of equipment that makes long passages much more restful and enjoyable. That's why going to sea to Portugal, where the passages would be long out of necessity, without one was an unattractive prospect.

For the next two days Joanna and I focused on locating a replacement belt on the internet. Eventually Joanna found a seller on eBay (in Latvia!) who could ship one, albeit with a delay of two to three weeks. Well! After some deliberation we decided to wait for the spare part in Spain before continuing to Portugal. In my eBay order I stipulated the address of the marina in Baiona as the delivery address. Baiona was our last landfall in Spain on the way south. We had almost three weeks to go sightseeing in the Galician *Rías*. We had to use that time well and to the full!

A Coruña is a big city and also a great city. The most attractive part is, in my opinion, the old town, perched on a rocky hill facing the bay and formerly walled. It is a labyrinth with no apparent design of narrow and steep cobbled streets, that take you from a square populated by chestnut trees, to the portal of a medieval church or monastery, to a row of old houses painted in pastel colours, with stone portals and glazed balustrades. Joanna and I spent a whole day exploring leisurely on foot that haunted neighbourhood where, should you be heedless, you may quite naturally come to ponder the possibility of bumping, at the turn of a narrow corner or in stepping across a stone courtyard,

into some dark becloaked character with a wide brimmed hat on his head and a rapier sword on his belt.

Our initial three-day stay in Coruña gave us the opportunity to take the pulse of the place, but little more, and many other places beckoned us.

The Old City of Coruña: Left Portal of the Collegiate Church of Santa María, Right Church of Santiago, both Romanesque style constructions of the 12th century. Centre; a pilgrim´s cross marking the route to Santiago de Compostela.

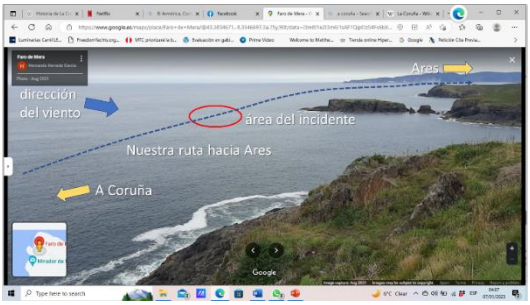
A Coruña is in a large bay - like the one of Brest - where three Rías converge: that of *Ferro*l, the northernmost one, that of *Betanzos*, the largest, and the Ria of Coruña, the smallest. With a minimum of research on the Internet, we decided on the Betanzos Ría as the most promising of the three from a touristic perspective. It was also the only one of the three Rías with free anchorages, which would save us a few good euros in marina fees.

On July 18th we left for Ares, a town on the north bank of the Betanzos Ria, with a beautiful wide beach and good references in the cruising guide. We expected an uneventful sailing of about four hours to Ares, with a light breeze from the SW during the first part of the trip. Once we progressed up the estuary, however, the direction and intensity of the wind was unpredictable. This was our first attempt.

Our cruise on the Ría de Betanzos

Just before coming across the *Mera* lighthouse we had the first incident with fishing gear of the trip. We were sailing with the engine running at low revs, a light breeze from the SW -I estimate about 6 or 7 knots- but with quite a bit of swell -waves of more than 1 meter- coming in from the ocean through the wide entrance to the bay. The swell was not caused by the breeze of that day but was the consequence of the gale of the previous days. Within a few seconds the engine accelerated for no apparent reason and then came to a complete stop and shut down.

The fault wasn't in the engine; I could start it without difficulty, but after several failed attempts, it was impossible to shift it into gear forward or backward. A cursory inspection revealed that there was indeed something tangled up in the propeller. The "something" turned out to be the floating line of a trap, possibly for crab or lobster, without a buoy or any other type of surface marking.



Stock photo from Google maps. The red circle indicates the approximate area where the incident occurred, about 250 meters from the islet seen in the image.

In that swell I didn´t think jumping in the water to cut the rope tangled up in the prop by hand would be a good idea to. The swell was rolling Nausikaä quite a bit. It was likely the blade of the rudder could hit me badly on the head with the swaying of the boat.

Sweating and puffing until red in the face, I managed to pick up one end of the rope on board and cut it from its tie at the bottom. All this took about fifteen minutes, at the end of which the drift had brought us within 100 meters of a rocky islet, and I could clearly see the bottom. The depth gauge marked 3 meters below the keel. In those waters full of submerged boulders and rocky reefs, this made me quite nervous.

We were free, although the engine was still inoperative. Joanna and I decided to go back to Coruña and sort the mess at the dock of the marina. There was no point in continuing towards our destination, we needed the engine to negotiate the access channels to the anchorages.

For any coastal sailor, this episode is something relatively common, almost mundane. In our case, however, it became an emergency. First, it was necessary to move away from the shallows and put more water under Nausikaä. Going towards Coruña, close hauled to a light breeze, and with the swell coming from directly ahead, our progress was nil. We were there for nearly an hour, trying to hold our position and make way forward, but drifting slowly and inexorably toward the rocks.

Lessons Learned

The ropes used by artisanal fishermen are mostly made of nylon or polypropylene, which have a specific density very similar to that of seawater. This means that they float in mid-water and extend horizontally along their entire length in the slightest current. They are not visible from the surface and represent an obstacle to propellers, keels, and rudder blades.

Nausikaä's profile, with a straight running keel and external rudder, should be less susceptible to entanglement, and yet we still fell victim to these invisible traps. The entire journey from the crossing of the English Channel was done dodging innumerable fishing obstacles: nets and traps, crabber and lobster cages anchored to the bottom and with a buoy or floating pennant to mark the spot. But buoys and pennants break off in high winds or rough seas, and the gear is lost or abandoned at the bottom of the sea, occasionally at depths of more than 100 meters, and with ropes of any length trailing gently beneath the surface like the tentacles of a jelly fish.

All of this had a bearing on our sailing plans. On the one hand, it seemed necessary to sail only during the day when obstacles could be seen. Still then, the sailing required an extra set of eyes, at all times scanning the horizon on either side of the bow. On the other hand, completely avoiding obstacles required going offshore outside the 100 meters (or more) isobar. This often meant moving many miles away from the most direct route between any two points. In addition, more than 100 meters deep in this part of the world is often the effective limit of the continental shelf, so the sea conditions to be found there would be more oceanic than coastal.

Joanna and I chose the lesser of these two evils, i.e. sailing during daytime and limiting night passages to those that, due to the contour of the coast and the bottom, would take us significantly offshore and away from the coast, where the density of fishing gear was predictably lower, if not zero. This also increased the number of intermediate stops and the effective time we would take to reach our final destination.

At the end of this time and with no apparent way out of the situation, I decided to -*Oh, the humiliating and ignominious shame of it!!*- call the port of A Coruña on the VHF and ask them to send us a rescue boat. In ten minutes, the rescue boat had arrived and was towing us at breakneck speed towards the marina.

Anyway, at the end of the afternoon, moored to the waiting dock at the marina, with my tail between my legs and 600 euros poorer (the cost of the alert response and the towing), I jumped into ice cold water to unravel the bird nest of nylon rope wrapped around the propeller. Even with the boat stationary in the marina, it took me about 20 minutes to do this.

We had a bit of a scare and the fiasco had cost us a lot of money. Looking at the rest of the trip, the lessons of the case had to be learned very well.

On the hook at the beach in Ares

Ares, Redes & Betanzos

We stayed in the Ría of Betanzos for six days, anchored first in Ares, a sleepy holiday resort with a wide beach almost 2 km long. Ares has a marina, but we chose to stay on the hook, among a dozen other sailboats, and move around with the dinghy. From Ares and just over a mile east along the north bank of the estuary is Redes. Redes is a charming fishing village, framed in a deep valley. The town does not have a port, just a tiny stone pier, but it does have a wide and clean anchorage where we dropped our hook at 4 meters depth, and where the water barely moved.

Redes, a charming fishing village in the Ría de Betanzos

These were hot and lazy days, with late morning dives from the boat into the clear, cold water of the Ría, lunches that went on for hours in one of the three eateries in the only town square, afternoon walks through the fields, hills, and beaches that surround the anchorage, and warm nights of dead calm in the cockpit of Nausikaä, listening to music, chatting, dreaming, and staring raptly at the overwhelming night skies. In other words, the very idea of an idyllic cruise!

However, the most memorable of those days was, in my opinion, the visit to the town of *Betanzos*. We left Nausikaä moored at the waiting dock of the *Sada* marina early in the morning and went upstream into the shallow estuary on the dingy.

Flauvium Brigantium the Romans called it, and there are those who maintain that Betanzos was the real city founded by Breogán, and not Coruña. In those times, the head of the estuary was much deeper, allowing the passage of large boats to Betanzos. Today, twenty centuries of deforestation and intensive agriculture in the surrounding steep hills have eroded the soil and flooded this stretch of the estuary with sediment, so that it is no longer navigable except on a dinghy.

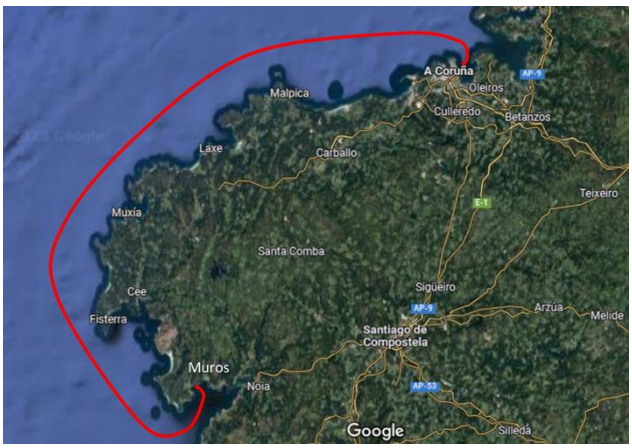


Left: Church of Saint Francis, with its Jacobean cross, built in the 14th century over the foundations of an earlier temple from Roman times. Centre and right. streets and portals of Betanzos.

It was a wonderful day of exploration without a plan, Joanna and I open and expectant to the charms offered by every corner, bend, and cobblestone passage. It was also a tiring day, as we covered more than three miles, back and forth, in the shoals of the estuary, at low speed in the dinghy, but the effort was worth it.

Again on board of Nausikaä at Sada, we decided to return to Coruña the next day, and thence to continue our route southward. It was still necessary to cover the stretch of the "Coast of Death" that extends between Coruña and Cape Finisterre before we could relax and enjoy the "stroll in the park" through the *Rías Bajas* that Alfredo Rodríguez had promised us in Ribadeo.

Coruña to Muros – 90 NM



Windy and AEMET (the Spanish Met office) forecasted variable northerlies between 10 and 15 knots, dropping to almost nothing overnight, with moderate NW swell and clear skies. All this insofar we didn't stray too far from the coast. Beyond 15 or 20 miles offshore the Galician coast were the ubiquitous Portuguese trade winds, blowing tirelessly at 25 knots and generating a swell in direct proportion.

At an average speed of 4.5 knots, the passage would take about 20 hours. Ideally, with that weather forecast, it wouldn't be difficult to make the crossing in one instance. However, given our recent disagreements with fishing gear in Coruña, night sailing close to the coast was a calculated risk. Our plan therefore included a 5-hour stop in *Camariñas*, a small Ría well protected from the wind and with a wide anchorage, simply to spend the night, avoid further unpleasantness with fishing gear, and rest for a few hours.

We departed Coruña on June 16th at 09:00, at high tide, with a moderate breeze astern and a radiant sun, and had fantastic sailing throughout that day. The calm sea allowed us to spot whales twice over the course of the afternoon. Too far away to identify the species though; Probably rorquals on their annual migration to northern Europe and the Norwegian Arctic.

Rounding Cabo Villano, about three miles north of Camariñas

That part of the coast offers spectacular scenery, with *Cabo Villano* being the most impressive, though certainly not the only one. In 1890, HMS Serpent, a British Navy cruiser, sank when she got lost in bad weather and ran aground on the reefs off the cape, losing 173 of the 179 lives on board. The victims rest in a cemetery next to the lighthouse, appropriately named the "Cemetery of the English."

I don't want to imagine what this coast is like in bad weather!

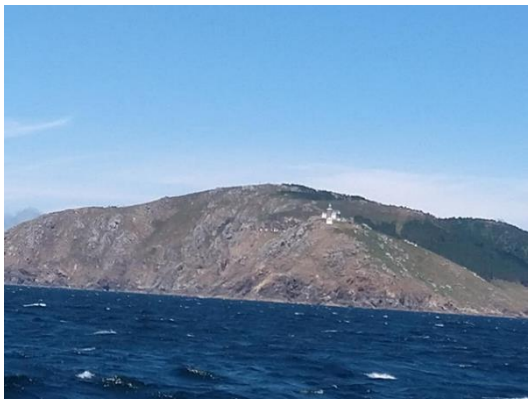
We arrived in Camariñas at dusk dropped hook at an anchorage about 800 meters from the fishing port, among a dozen other sailboats. The wind died down completely during the night, so we had a good, albeit short, rest. At 05:00 the next day it was time to leave for Finisterre and *Muros* with the tide.

Left: Jeannine and Simon de Haas, in their magnificent Hanse 38 named Katherina. Fair winds good friends! Centre and right. Nausikaä on the way to Finisterre from the Katherina. We had a reef on both sails in anticipation of the winds of more than 15 knots that Windy had forecasted for us that day as we rounded Finisterre.

The next morning, leaving Camariñas and passing in front of *Muxia* (on the south bank of the estuary) we crossed paths with good friends, Jeannine and Simon de Haas. We met in Gijón a few weeks before, while sheltering from the relentless westerly winds, and spent a couple of days exploring the city together. They left Gijón before us on their way to Lisbon. Now, on their way back from Portugal, they were sailing in the opposite direction, towards Belgium, to conclude their cruise. On that occasion, from the cockpit of the *Katherina,* Jeannine took some of the very few photographs I have of Nausikaä sailing.

One makes good friends in the marina and at anchor. It is always necessary to offer and receive a hand from other sailors in countless eventualities, and that allows for establishing ties with people who otherwise in our "normal" life, we would never have opportunity to meet. Chance encounters like this are some of the best that this form of cruising has to offer. Since then, Jeaninne's sailing

career has taken her across the Atlantic in 2020, and she was touring the Tuamotu Islands in French Polynesia in mid-2022. Fair winds Jeannine!



Cape Finisterre with its Lighthouse at the End of the World. This is where the "Coast of Death" ends.

The passage to Finisterre proceeded as planned, with fine weather and a moderate breeze astern, until past the cape. There, the valley behind the cape of Finisterre formed a funnel that channelled the wind with gusts of 25 knots, so we had to reduce sail even more. I abated the mizzen completely, put a second reef on the main, and we continued sailing towards Muros with a sail the size of a handkerchief.

And it was a necessary measure. To enter the Muros *Ría* sailing south it is necessary to turn east 90 degrees, so we had both the wind and the sea on the port beam. Even with two reefs in the mainsail, the boom at 90 degrees to starboard and the sheet almost limp, we were still making 5 knots SOW. These "new" sails are powerful indeed!

Muros to Baiona – 60 NM

The transit of Finisterre was made in the company of half-dozen other boats also heading south. Two of them, the smaller vessels, turned north once clear of the cape to seek refuge from the gusty winds in the lee of the cape´s cliffs. The larger boats, unencumbered by this, continued speedily south. About 10 NM past the cape, we turned due east towards Muros.

And immediately, the change was perceivable. Alfredo had warned us about this in Ribadeo. He had said then: *You will know when you are in the Rias Baixas. You´ll feel it in the air!* The breeze was cool in transit from Camariñas; oceanic, with a sharp bite that kept Joanna and I wrapped in our skins. As soon as we turned east and headed for the mouth of the *Ria de Muros y Noia*, the temperature of the air raised by several degrees and we could smell the vegetation: pine forests, grass and hay, exposed seaweed, like a warm, welcoming embrace. Good omen.

Muros and Noia is the northern-most of the *Rias Baixas*, the southern Rias, that enjoy somewhat of a microclimate, distinct from the dominant northern European Atlantic weather patterns of the NW corner of the Iberian Peninsula. Things grow in the Rias Baixas that do not anywhere else in Galicia. The waterside promenade of Muros gave us the first sight of palm trees of our tour. Palm trees that we would not see again until much further south in Portugal.

Muros is on the northern shore of the Ría, sheltered by cliffs and steep hills. There are no safe anchorages in the vicinity, so we moored at the marina, right at the entrance of the old town, and stayed there for four days.

One of those days we devoted to a visit to *Santiago de Compostela*. A detour unavoidable for Joanna, and always an absolute pleasure for me, no matter how many times I go there. I cannot make justice here to commenting on *Santiago de Compostela*; too marvellous a place, too large a scope, too unequal to the task my expressive means. Someday, perhaps, but not here and now.

Images of Muros. Top left: the town from the marina, right: the Town Hall building. Bottom left: the Church of Saint Peter, with its horreo (a stone granary), right: basement arcades of town houses.

Happy bunnies lunching in Muros!

Towards the end of our stay in Muros, Joanna received very disturbing news from Poland; a family tragedy had occurred. This marred our last days there, and although the poor girl tried very hard to put up a brave face, it was very, very hard on her.

We decided to head south to Bayona without delay. Bayona is next to Vigo, and Vigo has an international airport. Any chance of being able to fly back to Poland on short notice was far more likely from Vigo than

Muros

We almost stayed in Muros for good, the remaining trip forsaken, the promises of the sunny Med forgotten. It was that close. That´s the measure of how lovely and enchanting a place Muros is. From the first day, the first evening, the first light of the morning crowning the surrounding hills, Joanna and I were captivated by the charm of the place, of palm trees and ancient grey stones covered with yellow moss, of Jacobean stone crosses stalking every street corner, presiding over every hidden diminutive town square.

The town dates from the XIII century, being given borough status by King Sancho IV of Castille in 1286, but the village is much older; there is historical evidence of its existence in the X century, and written records of Viking raids in the Ría.

Little, if anything, remains from that time, but many stone buildings from the XVI and XVII centuries still stand on the waterfront and streets parallel to it, housing street cafes, restaurants, and chic fashion outlets on the lower level, and residential houses on the upper levels.

Joanna took hundreds of pictures. She has a professional photographer´s eye. And all of them still did not capture every nuance, every mood of the place.

Today Muros is a fishing harbour where the produce of hundreds of mussel farms in the Ria is landed, cooked, and tinned, and a holiday resort for Coruñeses and "picheleiros" (as the inhabitants of Santiago de Compostela call themselves).

Our sojourn in Muros kept us in a permanent state of wonder, like children anxious and excited for the next discovery, and towards the end of it, we were sad indeed we had to leave. Other shores called, and other discoveries.

from where we were. Even so, we both knew the chances of travelling internationally were scant, considering we were in the middle of the Delta wave of the Covid19 pandemic.

Moods of Muros, as captured by Joanna

The following day, 26th of July at 07:00, we cast off from the marina in Muros, and headed west, out of the Ria first, and then due south thereafter. The weather report announced very light breezes from the NW, and calm seas, so we anticipated having to do a considerable part of the way on the engine.

With a full head of sail only to keep Nausikaä from rolling, we steamed most of the way to Baiona. The breeze picked up from the N at the entrance of the *Ría de Vigo*, about 10 NM before Bayona. It was a good thing too. Vigo is the largest commercial port in the region, with a very busy shipping access lane through the Ria. I was good having that bit extra wind power and not depend solely on the engine.

The transit itself was delightful, with beautiful views on the horizon. Across the entrances of *the Ria de Pontevedra* and *Ría de Vigo* there is a group of islands (*Ons* and *Cíes* respectively) with steep cliffs that provide a beautifully varied landscape. These islands are part of a nature reserve, and access to them is strictly controlled. When planning our tour of Galicia, I had the hope of being able to spend a day or two visiting both. Sadly, circumstances decreed otherwise. We needed to get where we were going.

At the entrance of the *Ria de Pontevedra*, in the channel between the *Ons* and *Cíes* islands we sighted a pod of pilot whales going north. A while later, a couple of miles further south, what I believe was a pod or orcas. They were about a third of a mile offshore from us, so quite difficult to spot, but the scythe-blade shaped dorsal fins of the male orcas sticking out of the water was a clear sign.

We were the only boat in the water that day in the vicinity, but neither the pilot whales not the orcas showed the slightest interest in us. And a good thing it was too. Much later, when we were

already in Portugal, we learned of the first few troublesome encounters of sailing boats with orcas in that area, when the whales damaged boats by biting rudders off and damaging fin keels. Recently, in the last two years, these scary chance encounters have increased alarmingly in frequency, and extended from Galician waters south into Portugal all the way to the Gulf of Cadiz and the Gibraltar straights on the Atlantic side, on one occasion (that I know of) resulting in the total loss of the boat.

Wildlife sightings from Nausikaä in passage to Baiona. Left: Pilot whales. Right, Orcas

This strange behaviour of the killer whales has promoted huge debate in nautical circles and prompted rather ineffective action by environmental conservancy agencies in Spain and Portugal, with the prohibition to transit waters populated by orcas (how to do? when these pods cover huge territorial ranges!) and admonitions to sailors to avoid the animals if sighted. How does a sailing boat actively “avoid” a pod of orcas??

The behaviour is weird. It is something new, only occurring in the last three years. It also has, as far as I can figure, no evolutionary or functional advantage for the orcas. These are highly intelligent animals, socially cooperative predators and, in common with most other dolphins, demonstrably with a sense of humour: i.e. they play and do things for the sheer fun of it.

Problem is, should this aberrant behaviour continue or expand, there will be a boat skipper with the means to defend his boat against these “attacks”. It´s only a matter of time. Understandably so. The skipper´s first and foremost responsibility is the safety of his crew and his boat. I would do likewise. But this will create hysteria among sailors, and possibly lead to the killing of orcas unjustifiably.

Watch this space!

We arrived in Baiona with fading light and moored at the marina in the Puerto Deportivo. The offices were already closed so we had to wait to mid-morning the next day to register.

NOT ON BREAD ALONE

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Britain expanded its influence on all corners of the world and built its empire. It was able to do all this because it had the largest, most efficient, and most sophisticated navy and merchant marine in the world. British sailors could do and be all that only because they were also, overall, the best-fed and healthiest seafarers in the world.

Nausikaä's galley measures 90 centimetres long and 37 centimetres wide and is, in my opinion and in terms of functional space, the most important place on the boat. I can't stress enough the importance of having a well-equipped galley on board, and of maintaining a good and healthy diet when cruising for long periods. The more demanding the sailing and the worse the conditions, the better diet one should have. This is not to say that they are the same habits and diet that one has at home.

Nausikaä came without a stove. During the initial refit I decided not to install a marine cooker. Firstly, marine cookers -gimballed, two or three burners and an oven—are bulky, expensive to buy, and difficult to maintain. Similarly, a permanent on-board gas installation increased the premium of Nausikaä's insurance policy by 30%. At the time, I thought I would never ever use more than one burner at a time, and I would hardly cook a lasagna in the oven. If Muhammad doesn't go to the mountain... I therefore had to adapt my diet and eating habits to the culinary possibilities of the boat, and not the other way around. I manufactured and installed a gimbaled table in the space where the stove would go, and on top of it I put a small one-burner camping stove, fed with cartridge butane bottles. I also have a small microwave oven built into the port panel and an electric kettle that I can use only when moored to the dock, as they work with 220 V current. Apart from that, and so far, I have not missed any other infrastructure, and I have prepared rather sophisticated meals on board.

Nausikaä also came with a hard-to-reach vertical ice box, and an electric fridge compressor. I got rid of the compressor (it never worked), transformed the ice box into a storage space for all my spare sails, and bought a portable thermoelectric fridge, the kind used in campsites and RVs.

The thermoelectric fridge consumes about 1.5 Ah, which is very little. It does not make ice but keeps the contents at a temperature up to 20ºC below ambient. In other words, at 20ºC ambient, the beers are ready. At 35ºC, fresh milk spoils in the fridge within 24 hours. For ice, I have one of those Styrofoam coolers that I fill to overflowing with ice before I leave, and it lasts for three or four days.

A galley like Nausikaä's requires discipline. All galleys do! The fridge is reserved for the packaged beverages of the day (not water, which takes up too much space), dairy products (yogurts, butter, milk, fresh cheeses) and meat, fish, or products that are to be consumed within 24 hours. Everything else is left out. Fruit and vegetables go in hanging nets in the cabin.

My pantry contains mostly dry, canned and dehydrated products (mashed potatoes powder, couscous, polenta flour, soups in sachets, instant noodles, muesli and oatmeal, etc.), dried pastas and a variety of grains and pulses (dried, or cooked and packaged), packaged sauces, pickles and products preserved in vinegar or brine (pickles, gherkins, sauerkraut, olives, etc.), sausages and cured meats (ham, bacon, smoked sausages, salami, smoked pork loin, biltong (jerky), hard and smoked cheeses, etc, etc). All these products keep well without refrigeration for two to three weeks unopened, and for a week or more once opened if stored in sealed containers and/or plastic bags. Milk for coffee: powdered and/or evaporated in small containers that can be consumed in a short time. Fresh bread I buy on land for up to two days. On board I bring unleavened bread packaged in

nitrogen atmosphere (pita, wheat or corn tortillas, naan bread, etc.) and packaged biscuits and cookies. Fats: olive oil and (little) butter or margarine. Fresh eggs: I cover the shell with a thin film of petroleum jelly and they keep well without refrigeration for a week or more. How do I know if the eggs are still good after a few days? I put them into a bowl of sea water. If they float, they must be thrown away. If they go to the bottom, they're fine.

I don't carry junk food!! i.e. chips, nachos, cheetos, chocolate bars, *et al*. They take up too much space, have too much salt and/or sugar, and minimal nutritional value.

At the dock, I can prepare in Nausikaä everything that can be done in a pot and a pan at home, and I do the shopping on the day according to the evening menu. I have on board a set of 2 Tefal pots and two pans with their respective lids, and with a single removable handle; They take up little space and are easy to store vertically.

Sailing, it is not unusual that conditions do not allow me to cook something without danger of scalding my skin, but I almost always can at least boil a kettle of water. This way I can create a hot meal thanks to the dehydrated products. Add hot water and I´m good to go!

Of fundamental importance to me also is to have a good assortment of nuts, dried fruits, and good quality sweets onboard (dark chocolate, marzipan, crystallised fruit, nougat, etc). I blend the ingredients and store it in an airtight container. The purpose of this is to provide me with high-calorie, high-protein food that can be eaten at the helm, at night or in bad weather, and with the hand. This, and a cup of hot instant soup, has kept me a functional member of the human race on those occasions.

Of equally fundamental importance, is having a good selection of spices, sauces, and packaged dressings on board. No matter how simple and boring the base of any meal is, it can always be made interesting and appetizing with the appropriate sauce.

The proof of all this strategy: after almost four months sailing, and mostly eating on board, when I arrived in Torrevieja I was thin as a reed, strong as a rhyno, during the day alert and energetic, I slept like a log at night, I never went hungry or missed my kitchen at home, and I never felt healthier in my life!

Alcohol

Traditionally (at least in the UK) pleasure boats are "dry", i.e. the skipper does not allow the consumption of alcohol while sailing. I subscribe to that rule, but I'm flexible. I don't normally consume alcohol while I'm on watch. The beers are left for when I get to port, or until someone relieves me of the watch, which doesn't happen when I'm alone. Today (not so during the voyage from Lowestoft) I don´t keep wine on board; it spoils with the high temperatures and constant swaying of the boat. I have only one bottle of aged Caribbean rum. Exclusively for medicinal uses! ;-)

Dehydration

The thing about alcohol consumption is not an ideological stand on my part. One gets dehydrated at sea at best of times. Alcohol consumption only makes the situation worse. Dehydration promotes dizziness, nausea, and in extreme cases, can incapacitate a person.

In Nausikaä I have a 100-litre freshwater tank. When I fill the tank, I add half a cup of sodium hypochlorite to this water. This keeps the water drinkable, but without it smelling like a swimming

pool. Additionally, I also carry 30-40 Liters of bottled water. This water is for direct consumption. The water in the tank is mainly for cooking and personal hygiene. I also carry a couple of bottles of fruit concentrates (*chordials*) that I mix with the bottled water: Britvic, Robinson's, etc, the kind that kids like. With the water at room temperature, these concoctions make the task of staying hydrated a little tastier: 1.5 to 2 Liters of water every 24 hours minimum!

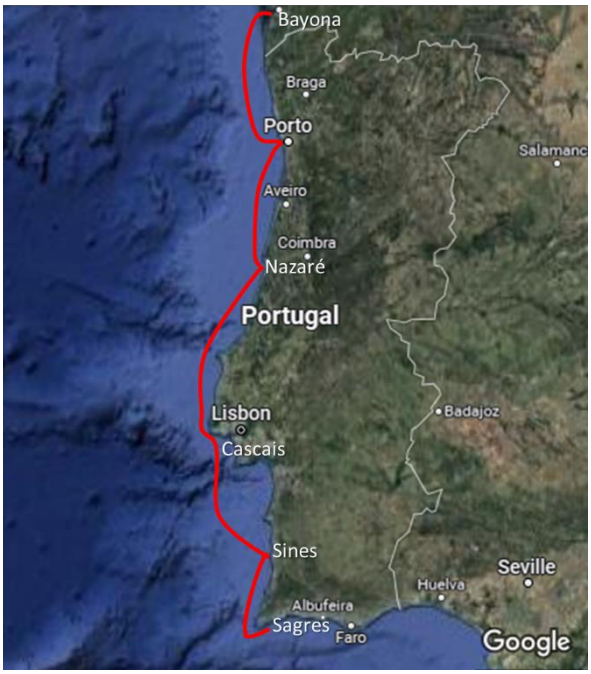
PORTUGAL AND THE ATLANTIC

Just by looking at the charts, the contrast was stark. Up to now, we had (I had overall since leaving Lowestoft) sailed mostly coastal waters dominated by local winds and periodical tidal currents. Even in Galicia, the weather patterns, general climate, and sailing dynamics were those of the environs of Biscay. Also, the configuration of the coastline provided abundant harbours and protected anchorages relatively close to each other. Lots of options to drop the hook to avoid bad weather or catch some ZZs.

Portugal was different; a low, straight, featureless coastline of unending sandy beaches and dune fields, punctuated by few rocky points and shallow river mouths. The coastal waters there were also subjected to the full influence of the Atlantic, unimpeded by obstacles. Of course there are tides in Portugal, but in a coastline running almost straight N-S, tidal currents were a concern only when coming into harbour and at the mouth of rivers. Two other factors had a bearing in our planning. Firstly, most harbours and refuges were at the mouth of rivers of shallow entrance and barred by sand banks. As soon as the weather worsens, the Atlantic swell becomes dangerous and port authorities close the entrance to sailing boats. This is done to prevent accidents and floundering of small craft in the entrance channel that may interrupt commercial shipping. Secondly, there are few harbours to provide shelter. Therefore, our planning had to include quite a few long-ish (around 150 NM) passages that included night sailing, simply because there was nothing else between two given points of the route.

There is also a neat North/South divide with respect to the weather during the summer months. Roughly, conditions on the northern half of the Portuguese coast are determined by the Portuguese Trades. These blow from a northerly or north-westerly direction relentlessly at 20-30 knots quite close to the shore. Further south from *Peniche* the Trades dilute somewhat, turn north-easterly, and blow further away from the continent. Consequently, localised weather patterns are more prominent (albeit less predictable) towards *Sines* and the *Algarve*.

Our groove in Northern Portugal was a narrow strip of water, perhaps 20-30 miles wide from the shore, where the trades weaken but still blow reliably from the north during daylight hours. The drawback is that the Trades produce localised strong upwelling events against the coast, and the upwelling generate pea-soup adiabatic fog banks during the night and early mornings.



We spent a few days in Baiona dedicated to performing some required maintenance on the boat, getting the autopilot operational (the replacement belt was waiting for us at the marina), restocking Nausikaä with provisions, fuel, and water, and doing all the chart planning work required up to Cape Saint Vincent and *Sagres.*

Our initial plan included four legs on the way south, all between 80 and 150 NM in length, with stopovers in *Matosinhos* - just north of Porto, *Nazaré* – of famous huge surfing waves and half-way down to Lisbon, *Cascais* - at the entrance of the Tagus River and next to Lisbon, and *Sines* – the birthplace of Vasco da Gama. Our destination on this part of the trip was Cape St. Vincent and *Sagres*. These were harbours with all-weather access, and places of touristic interest to visit in Portugal.

We could have done it in fewer steps. Sure! However, I wanted to be conservative and have plenty of elbow room to change my mind *en-route*, in response to the weather and/or other unforeseeable factors. This is so because I did not, as I did in Brest and Ribadeo, have the benefit of advice from kind-hearted local sailors on local conditions, the kind of stuff no global computer weather model gives you. No-one in Portugal to tell me first-hand what I could expect or how to prepare for it.

Bayona to Port of Leixões (Matosinhos) – 80 NM

We left Bayona at daybreak on the 31st of July at the top of the tide, the passage being planned for 18 hours, so ETA in *Matoshinhos* was around midnight. Windy predicted moderate north-westerlies during daylight hours, and a light onshore (westerly) breeze during the night.

Matosinhos, about 5 NM up the coast north of Porto, is a large commercial harbour open to the south and of easy entrance independently of the tide. I chose it with preference to Porto because the entrance into Porto through the *Douro* River mouth, with a huge north breakwater and open to the West and South, is challenging in the best of conditions, more so on the ebb tide at night. As soon as the wind picks up from anywhere in the North quadrant, large breakers form around the tip of the breakwater. The problem was not so much coming in, but in exiting again should the weather worsen. I did not want to get stuck inside the river for days on end wating for the wind to shift, had had enough of that in other places on this journey already!

We made good progress south during the morning and early afternoon, averaging 5 knots and with a clear sky. Passed *Viana do Castello* south of the river *Miño* by late morning, *Esposende* by mid-afternoon, and we were just north of *Povoa do Varzim*, our designated refuge, as the sun was nearing the horizon. Neither Joanna nor I thought there was any need to invoke a plan B, so we continued happily south on our course. Soon after the sun was below the horizon though, the nice breeze we had on our starboard beam all day begun to die out. As night closed in, we were completely becalmed. It also got noticeably colder on deck. I leaned overboard and dipped a hand in water much colder than we had during the day. It was clear to me we had entered and upwelling area.

And then we hit the fog. As I recall, we did not enter an existing fog bank, as we did in Biscay coming into Gijón. The fog just formed around us. It started higher up first. The stars disappeared from the sky as if they had been obliterated with an eraser. A waning moon was supposed to rise at around 22:00, but if it did or didn´t, we never noticed. By that time, I could not see the bow of the boat or the sails halfway up. We were inside a ball of dark grey cotton! I have a powerful hand-held spotlight on board, but it was no use to point it in any direction. All I could see was a thick, impenetrable curtain the colour of led ten feet away from me.

Apart from reducing visibility to nothing, the fog has another effect: it dampens sound. In that calm, it was eerily, unnervingly silent. All I could hear was the engine chugging. The open sea is a noisy place, and in the dark one comes to depend on that cacophony to gauge wind, sea, and course.

Changes in conditions or in the orientation of the boat to the swell are immediately noticeable, at an almost subliminal level, just by changes in the noise pattern.

Joanna and I were supposed to keep watches during the night, so the other could rest. I had the midnight watch: 00:00 to 02:00. In those conditions however, we agreed that both of us should stay awake to provide support to the each-other. We were about 9 miles offshore, hugging the 100 m isobath and on a course due S. I think we were both silently praying we did not have another close encounter with fishing gear!

At 23:00 the radar was showing me three targets within an 8 NM radius, two behind us and one in front. The AIS only showed two targets, a trawler behind us, and a Portuguese Navy vessel ahead of us. The second radar target behind us, probably also another trawler judging by its zigzagging course, had its AIS switched off. Or didn´t have one at all, take your pick!

According to the AIS, the Portuguese Navy vessel ahead of us was the NRP Escorpião, a 100-tonne oceanic patrol boat 30 mts long and was coming in the opposite direction to us. A few mins later the radar (thank goodness for the B&G engineers and product designers, they saved our skin that night!) threw a collision course warning alarm. I immediately swung wide to starboard. If the patrol boat could see us on its radar, I wanted to make our change of course clear and unequivocal. After 10 mins or so, once the alarm had disappeared from my screen, I resumed my original course of 170 on the compass.

The Escorpião passed us 150 mts to port. We did not see it nor hear it!

The following three hours to *Matosinhos* were rather nerve-wrecking, with our eyes glued to the radar screen. I assigned Joanna the role of glass wiper. My spectacles kept on misting up every 5 minutes in the fog, to the point that I could no longer make up the plotter screen. She must have used up four rolls of toilet paper that night!

At 02:30 we were a mile off *Matosinhos* and still could not see for shit, not even a change of hue on the pitch-black sky to port indicating the lights of a major town. Nutin! I had set the screen on the plotter to over impose the radar to the chart. There was a discrepancy between the two. Nothing too bad, perhaps 20 meters? But coming into harbour, 20 meters could be the difference between staying in the entry channel and ending up on top of a rock.

At this point I gave the wheel to Joanna and went forward with the spotlight. Perhaps I could spot a rock straight in front of us, and at least scream a warning to the helm.

How we squeezed into the harbour entrance, totally blind and navigating by instruments, is a miracle of modern technology. That, and Joanna´s nerves of steel at the helm! We saw the red beacon at the end on the South breakwater when we were already past it and at 30 mts distance. Only then, we began to make up some street lighting to starboard, 100 meters from us.

The marina on the port of *Leixões* is a 4 pontoon, 200 berth operation on the north side of a busy commercial harbour. We moored on the first berth that appeared available at the Marina at 03:00, and Joanna and I collapsed exhausted on the cockpit of Nausikaä. We were absolutely drained of all energy, yet still running too much on adrenaline to go to sleep.

Cracking a frosty in Leixões at 03:30 in the morning

I opened the last beer left in the fridge and shared it with Joanna in a quiet celebration of finally being in Portugal. *Leixões* was an important milestone. It represented the exact halfway point between Lowestoft and Torrevieja.

Leixões to Nazaré – 100 NM

The port of *Leixões* gave us shelter for a few days from the Portuguese trades, which picked up relentless the morning after our arrival and kept us in harbour. We used the time to rest and put one day aside to visit the gorgeous city of Porto, a one-hour local bus ride away.

Porto and the River Douro from the top of the Luis I bridge.

The city of Porto is ancient. And no wonder, as it is privilegedly located in a deep, protected river valley with a navigable inlet from the sea; something rare in that part of the coast. The Romans called it *Portus Cale*, (the Latin name later gave rise to the name of Portugal), but its origin as a settlement possibly goes back to the late bronze age. Local lore says the Phoenicians had a trading outpost there, bringing tin from Armorica and Cornwall into the Mediterranean.

Left & centre, trying not to get blown away by the wind on the beach in Leixões. Right: Architecture of old town of Porto

The architecture of the old town, leaning on the Douro riverbank, is truly gorgeous. I had been there a couple of years prior, on a tour my mother and I made through Galicia and northern Portugal, so knew what to expect, but Joanna was ecstatic with the perceptive onslaught of shape, colour, and texture that surrounded her.

We had lunch that day on one of the restaurants lining the old wine docks. Perhaps I have eaten better Atlantic cod fish in my life than on that afternoon in Porto, but I really can't remember where.

The only inconvenience that day (admittedly an exasperating one) were the crowds. They were overwhelming! It was barely possible to walk straight on the streets, Joanna and I had to open a path with our elbows up and down the steep paved steps that lead to the waterfront and waited at the restaurant standing up in the sun for over an hour to be seated for lunch.

It was Sunday 02 August, the height of the summer season. I expected the place to be busy, but the sheer multitudes somewhat marred our enjoyment of the place and shortened the hours we wanted to spend savouring its charms. Evidently, Covid was less virulent in Portugal!

By the time we got back to the marina in *Leixões*, we were rather exhausted. The weather forecast promised an improvement from the ferocious Portuguese trades in the following two days, and a north-westerly of 10 to 15 knots on Tue 04. We decided to put to sea the earliest daylight allowed on that day, and head for Nazaré, 100 miles down the coast. On Monday we made ready on Nausikaä, and I plotted the route of a passage we anticipated to take between 20 and 22 hours to complete. Our "refuge" was Figueira da Foz, another river mouth harbour about two thirds of the way down to Nazaré.

We were ready to leave at 06:00 on Tuesday, in a thick morning fog, though not as impenetrable as we had coming in a few days before. Our departure was delayed, however. In asking permission to leave from the harbourmaster on the VHF, we were told to stay put and wait. There was quite a lot of commercial traffic through the harbour entrance, two large container ships and a bulk carrier exiting at that time. Finally, at about 08:30 we headed for the Atlantic Ocean.

The fog lifted about mid-morning, but the promised north-westerlies never materialised, so we steamed at 4.5 knots SOW, but with a completely unexpected and very favourable 2 knot current due south carrying us at 7 knots SOG.

The wind finally picked up by mid-afternoon as we were nearing *Figueira da Foz*. It had been an enjoyable day sailing so far, and although we had seen quite a few fishing pods around us, the density of obstacles did not spring any alarm in our minds looking at the night ahead. Passing *Figueira* we were doing 4 knots under sail, but I suspected in the evening the breeze would die down again, so I left the engine running at low revs.

Just before sundown and about 20 miles south of *Figueira*, the engine revved up all on its own and then stopped.

*Oh f*ck…. Not again!!!!*

As before, I could start the engine, but not put into gear. This time however, we were utterly on our own. Far from rescue (I doubted it I could even reach the port of *Figueira* at that distance on the VHF), about 10 miles offshore, out of sight of the coast, and with 86 meters of water below our keel. Not that it made any difference to be further inshore, as there was absolutely nowhere to run to on that stretch of coast.

The sun was about to set, and I estimated I had less than one hour left of useful daylight, so immediate action was required. We hoved-to on Nausikaä and let her drift with the breeze, locking the rudder full to starboard. Then, donning the long john of my wetsuit, mask, and fins, I jumped overboard armed with a utility knife. The water was ominously gloomy below me.

This time there was no fishing line tangled up in our prop. What there was, was a very large plastic bag. One of those woven polyester fibre jobs used to bag potatoes. In growing darkness, and more by touch than sight, I started to free the propeller. It took me 20 minutes to cut, tear, and gnaw my way through that mess to get the prop to turn again. During the last few minutes, I asked Joanna to shine the spotlight down the stern of Nausikaä and onto the rudder and prop. The propeller was turning free, but there were still plastic fibres stuck inside the prop shaft tube. If left there I feared these fibres could travel up the propeller shaft tube and damage the dripless gland seals. Having to

replace a damaged dripless would require taking the boat out of the water and days, if not weeks, of delay.

Over one hour after the onset of the incident I was back on the cockpit, tired, shivering cold, with barnacle cuts on my shoulders and neck from propping myself and rubbing against the rudder blade, but with the engine chugging happily. We were on our way again!

The breeze did not die out that night as I thought it would; it stayed blowing 10 knots steadily from the NW. We gull winged Nausikaä with preventers on both sails and had a very pleasant night sail up to Nazaré at 4.5 knots average. That night, dolphins came to say hello and stayed with us, on and off, until just before dawn. After the ordeal earlier I was hugely appreciative and filled with heart-felt emotional gratitude for the merry company. Always good to know you have friends around, even if you are on your own!

Nazaré

Nazaré is a pleasant holiday resort with a huge, wide, blindingly white sandy beach, and a purpose-built small yacht harbour. By purpose-built I mean just that, dug up in the middle of the straight beach, with round breakwaters to stop the ocean. Which is amazing, since just a couple of miles down the coast, at *Sao Martinho do Porto*, there is a large, absolutely gorgeous semi-circular bay with a narrow entrance, and protected by natural rocky ridges on both sides. Why building the marina at Nazaré, and having to remove cubic kilometres of sand from the beach to do so, when there is one provided by nature at stone-throw distance away?

Nazaré is also a Mecca for daredevil surfers that come to ride the truly monstrous waves that form in front of the rocky point at the fort of *Sao Miguel Arcangel*. It is a weird phenomenon. The waves come out of nowhere from the southwest and in the horizontal space of a few hundred meters rise up to 30 + meters high. These waves are produced by the Atlantic long period swell funnelling between the near vertical walls of an underwater canyon that plunges to over 4000 meters depth at the abyssal bottom of the ocean. It is really a narrow, deep slit on the continental shelf off Portugal, and the bottom is already 300 meters deep within swimming distance off the Nazaré beach.

Thankfully, here was no big Atlantic swell and no waves when we arrived, mid-morning of the fifth of August. Not the season, I guess.

Left, the beach at Nazaré from the Sao Miguel castle. The yacht harbour can be seen in the middle of the long beach. Right: stock pic from Google of the waves at the cape

We gave the cape a wide berth, sailed across over the canyon, and entered the yacht basin from the west.

One of our neighbours at the marina in Leixões, an Englishman, long-term resident of Matoshinhos, and owner of a Fisher 25, had warned us. He said then: *No need to look at the chart. You´ll **know** you are truly southbound once you get past Nazaré. The ocean and the sun change there!* And indeed

they did! Already in Nazaré, and from there on, the Atlantic was indigo blue, and turquoise in the shallows, even in cloudy days. The skies were open and the sun was a warm, cheerful disk high up, shimmering on the water like a million diamonds, impossibly orange and red at dawn and dusk.

Yes, this is the first place I get to since I left Lowestoft almost one year ago, that truly ***feels*** like summer. *Yes…. we are getting nearer, I thought!*

Nazaré is also famous for being the dolphin-spotting capital of Portugal. They are everywhere, onshore and quite a way off, and there are in the yacht basing several commercial craft with glazed bottoms that take tourists out dolphin watching. During the entire journey from Brest I saw mostly common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), but in Nazaré I also spotted a pod of bottlenose dolphin (first in the voyage), and maybe also Atlantic spotted dolphin, but I´m not quite sure about those.

An incident exemplifies our wonder, Joanna´s and mine, at being surrounded by dolphins. Normally, when you encounter dolphins on your way, they are going somewhere. They may deviate and come around to have a look at you, perhaps race your bow for a few minutes, but then they get tired, or bored, and continue on their way in whatever direction they were going to in the first place.

Coming out of Nazaré on our way to *Cascais* two days later, on a gorgeous, calm, early morning, I pointed Nausikaä straight out to sea, as it happened, right along the head of the underwater canyon, a few hundred yards off the harbour entrance. Quite suddenly, we were surrounded by common dolphin, a large number of them. Now, these animals were not going noticeably anywhere, they were just frolicking around at the head of the canyon. Straight ahead on our course, there was a group - perhaps a family group – of several individuals with a couple of juveniles, quite young, little more than babies really, less than a meter long. One of those babies kept sticking its head out of the water, almost gliding or surfing on its pectoral fins for a second or two before submerging and coming out again.

This is a very unnatural gait for a dolphin. It was so strange to me that I though the dolphin was in distress, perhaps tangled up in something and impeded to swim properly. So much so that I stopped Nausikaä dead in the water and turned her around to check on the little fellow.

Nope! Nothing amiss that I could see. The other adult animals were swimming right beneath Nausikaä's keel, apparently unconcerned. It then dawned on me that the dolphin was only trying to keep its head and eyes out of the water for long enough to have a good look at us!

A few seconds later, they all aligned themselves in the same direction again and disappeared in a jiffy.

Rounding up the cape at Peniche on the way to Cascais

Nazaré to Sines (via Cascais)

The way down to Cascais, at the entrance of the huge estuary of the river Tagus was without any of the incidents that had plagued us the days before. We covered the distance quickly at 5.5 knots average, with a good breeze from the NW, arriving in Cascais shortly after sunset. If I remember correctly, I set the sails to port on a broad reach and did not change the setting again during the entire passage.

Our original plan was to sail directly to *Sines*, halfway to the *Algarve*, but the weather window was too narrow to cover the whole distance. The Portuguese weather service was announcing the arrival of a low-pressure system and a weather front in less than 24 hours. The wind would be against us for two to three days. It did not make sense to me to tack upwind offshore for half the distance, with steep seas, and making poor progress. Stopping in *Cascais* would also give us the opportunity of visiting *Estoril* and Lisbon, a few km east up the Tagus estuary. Also, we had not had the opportunity to load fuel, water, or victuals in *Nazaré*, which was necessary before continuing to *Sines*, so we moored at the marina in *Cascais* to let the weather front pass over us and restock Nausikaä.

Since the opening of the large marina (600+ berths) in 1999, *Cascais* has become the preferred port of call in the vicinity of Lisbon for traffic coming from northern Europe into the Med, as well as boats crossing the Atlantic clockwise. Justifiably so. Entry into the Tagus estuary is laborious and the two other marinas in the environs of Lisbon are small and crowded.

Views of Cascais

Cascais on the other hand, is of easy entrance and exit in all weather and there is also a decent protected anchorage in front of the *Praia da Ribeira* next door to the port. Facilities are excellent, and there are many eateries and shops on the main dock, and good nautical service providers all around. Very posh though, and quite expensive! Like *Punta del Este*.

Cascais

Cascais itself is an attractive holiday resort with airs of provincial exclusivity. It has an impressive XVII Century fortress that one of the last Kings of Portugal, can´t remember which, transformed into a summer residence for the monarchy. Since then, what was originally a fishing village with some history (the settlement dates from roman times) became a chic summer resort to the European aristocracy and Lisbon´s wealthy bourgeoisie.

Something of the glamour remains in the gaps left by the touristic massification, in the form of a few scattered late XIX century quaint palazzos, with tiled art nouveau facades, stained windows, minaret towers and round balconies providing shaded views into the bay.

To some extent, it reminded me of Estepona, Puerto Banús, and Torremolinos in the late '70s: little coastal villages transformed into tourist attractions, with cobbled pedestrian streets, cafés on the sidewalks, and little outlets with stylish pretentions selling trinkets to the tourists. The informal and relaxed atmosphere contributes considerably to the enjoyment of the place.

We had a good couple of days in Cascais, despite the unstable weather, lazily legging the old town up and down and sampling the delicacies of the local cuisine and some absolutely superb Alentejo wines.

The storm front had passed. It blows again from the NE. Time to go!

We spent three days there, waiting for the weather. On the morning of August 12th, we left the marina and dropped the hook at the anchorage next door in the bay. Windy promised us steady

northeasterlies for the following 48 hours. Good opportunity to make the jump to *Sines* in the *Alentejo*. About 70 NM passage.

Beyond *Cabo Espichel*, south of Lisbon, the coast bends eastwards in a large bight. Consequently, the passage to *Sines* is offshore(ish). This was good. On the one hand, it got us away from the coast and the minefield of fishing gear scattered about. It also got us away somewhat from the nearshore diurnal wind pattern of offshore breezes during the morning, onshore during the afternoon, and dead calm at night. A little further off the coast we could hopefully count with steady northeasterlies, even at night. We planned a night passage from Cascais with a late morning arrival in Sines, between 16 and 18 hours in total.

On the way to Sines, shepherded by the moon.

We left the anchorage in Cascais at 21:00 and, after an anxious moment when Joanna misread the plotter and pointed us directly into the Cascais breakwater, we headed for Sines guided by a gorgeous Saracen moon.

We had one of the most (to me anyway) memorable night sails of the entire journey. The moon stayed with us for four hours, and after that, the sky was overwhelming with stars. Not a light in the horizon, not a target on the AIS. The breeze in my ear, the whisper of unseen waves toppling over a few yards from our beams, the swish of Nausikaä's wake as it closed behind the rudder. All the senses not exercised during normal life are set to top notch in the dial.

That evening I requested -as usual- the midnight watch: 00:00 to 02:00. When Joanna came to relieve me at the end of it, I sent her back to sleep. I had a shooting star shower above me. I was not done with the experience, had not completely got to grips with all the magic. I would take the second watch as well. She could have the sunrise watch 04:00 to 06:00! I convinced myself that also suited her aesthetic temperament better than the charming but gloomy mysteries of the dark.

The whole passage was done under sail with a 12-knot breeze on the port hind quarter, and one-meter seas from the SW. At 04:00, Joanna finally emerged through the companionway and kicked me out from behind the wheel. It was her turn to have fun!

Sines' yacht harbour and marina, from high up the cliff

Aye aye Capt´n!!!

Early in the morning the wind picked up without changing direction, so it was time for some energetic steering. We sailed into the large commercial bay of Sines at 11:00 that morning, in glorious sunshine, and more than ready for a cool beer when we managed to get ashore.

Sines

The birthplace of Vasco da Gama.

And no wonder he sailed to India! The old town is perched and hanging with nail and tooth on

top of a high cliff, with the best view of the Atlantic Ocean I have ever beheld. The whole place seems to be permanently whispering in your ear… "*Go on, get out there*!!"

We moored at the marina between a 45-foot Hanse and a French-flagged 50-footer Ovni built of aluminium, with a pendulum swing keel, that looked more like a spacecraft than a boat. Nausikaä, comparatively small and ungainly, cut a poor figure in among that royalty. But you know what? I realised we were just as offshore-savvy and as salty a herring as the largest of those floating palaces around us, boasting washing machines and satellite cable TV. Good to know size still matters not that much in some things!

Joanna after steering us into mooring flawlessly in between big boats in Sines. Happiest of bunnies!

We puffed up the cliff in search of a place to have a late lunch and found it at the very end of a cobbled, narrow, winding street, on a taverna with a cane-roofed terrace and cast-iron tables covered with oilcloth tabletops.

Oh… and what a lunch! There was a grill going at the back of the establishment, so guess: sardines fished that morning, cuttlefish, tomatoes the colour of rubies, marinaded dark olives the size of dates, and a whole grilled Atlantic codfish done to perfection to share! All washed down with a bottle of that fresh, fruity white *Alentejo* we had so enjoyed in Cascais. I believe we rolled down the hill back to the harbour that day!

Views of Sines. Left: the castle at the top of the cliff. Centre: the harbour from the castle battlements. Right: again from the battlements, the street at the end of which we found our lunch.

We spent two days in *Sines*, enjoying the place to the full. And it has a long history to enjoy! There is bronze and iron-age archaeology in the surrounding area, and to the left of the castle, leading to the commercial harbour, we visited the ruins of a Roman industrial-scale *garum* factory.

Garum (also called *liquamen* in Roman cooking treaties) is a fermented fish sauce of ancient recipe, popularised by the Roman legionnaires that used it to season the wheat porridge that was the base of their diet. From them, it spread to civil roman society, and Rome took the concoction everywhere around the Mediterranean and the four corners of the empire. Garum was made by packing fish guts and small fish layered with salt and vinegar tight into a terracotta amphora, covering the vessel with waxed rags, and then letting the mix ferment in the sun for several months. If the whole thing didn´t catch fire or explode violently at the smallest shake of the amphora, what came out was a liquid that after repeated filtering and refining had the colour of dark amber and the consistency of runny honey.

In a little delicatessen shop in *Sines* we bought a bottle of modern-age Garum made (we were assured of this in earnest by the young shop attendant) strictly according to the ancient recipes! She gave us a little to taste over a piece of bread: something halfway between Thai fish sauce and

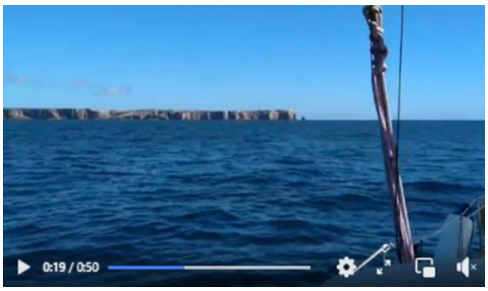
Worcester sauce! Good addition to the spice rack of Nausikaä, I thought. I believe today the damned Garum is still on the boat, stashed somewhere, unopened!

Cape Saint Vincent and Sagres

The passage between Sines and *Sagres*, just around Cape St Vincent, was estimated in 60 NM, 12 hours at 5 knots. We had good weather and steady northerlies but keeping a 5-knot ***average*** for those many miles required a steady breeze of around 12 to 15 knots true. Coming into *Sagres* at night was an unattractive proposition. Firstly, I did not know what conditions we would encounter rounding the cape. Headlands on the Portuguese coast channel the northerlies on the lee in unexpected ways. In addition, there is another one of those Portuguese deep underwater canyons right in front of Cape St Vincent. I had no idea what sea conditions I would encounter there.

Secondly, *Sagres* is a small fishing port without a marina. There is a little anchorage on the bay, which is protected by the breakwater, but not much else in the way of shelter. Having to pick up a buoy or drop the hook in an unknown place, in the dark and in a blow, did not seem like a good idea.

Morning approaching Cape St Vincent



Rounding Cape St Vincent on the engine

Our estimation therefore was around 15 hours for the passage, and we would leave before daybreak to round the cape with good viz and get to *Sagres* with sunlight to spare.

We left Sines in late afternoon of August 14th, with a light breeze from the ENE and overcast skies and had an uneventful sail at 4.5 knots average for most of the night. A few lights on the horizon this time, on the ocean side, trawlers hugging the 200 m depth isobath at the edge of the continental shelf, but nothing closer to us.

At daybreak we were 15 miles north of the cape and wind and sea conditions were good. The sky had cleared completely. The wind died out to almost nothing, so we started the engine to keep to our average speed. We steamed around Cape St Vincent in calm, flat conditions, and made it to the anchorage in front of Sagres by early afternoon.

I posted this on Nausikaä's page in FB. I think it summarises our feelings, Joanna´s and mine, at the time:

"Cape St Vincent. We've been sailing due south, pretty much, since we left Brest at the end of June, Joanna and me. I have been sailing south, pretty much since I left Lowestoft in the UK on the fourth of August 2019! Today, we start sailing east. All the way to de delta of the river Nile if we fancy! 😅

I never fully expected, honestly, I would ever get here. It was a wish, a prayer, a feverish (someone said to me) dream. I never confidently expected this bathtub with masts of mine will bring us all the way here, in safety and comfort. I can´t express what it feels like... We are tied to a buoy on the bay of Sagres now. I just opened the beer I was keeping in the fridge for this occasion. Tonight, a good diner and a bottle of wine. Tomorrow shall be another day, and the wind will decide our destiny. But today, we rounded St Vincent!!!!! 👍👍👍😎*"*

OLD DOG TRICKS

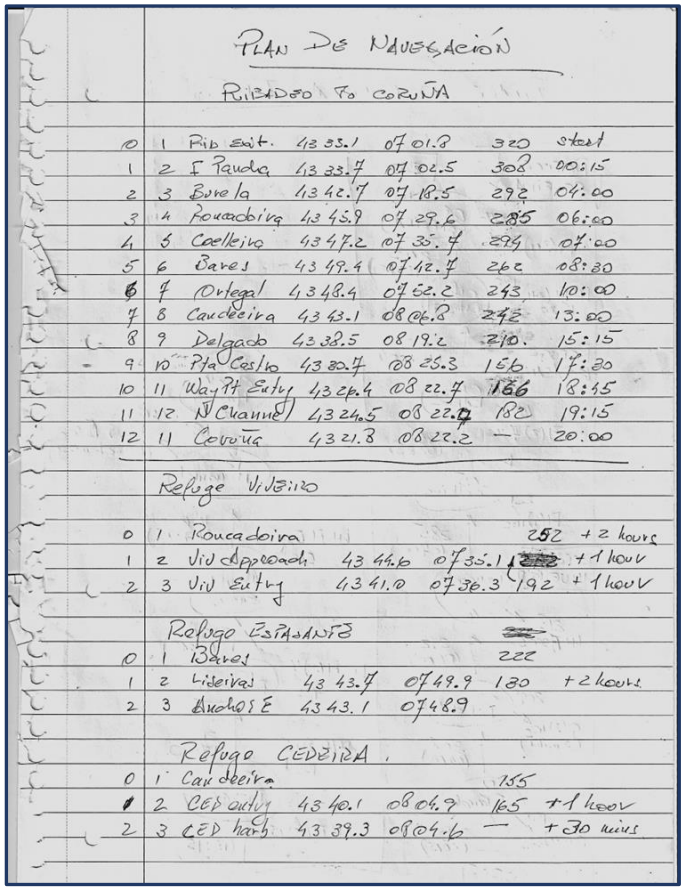
I confess I can be quite fastidious when it comes to the chart work prior to any sailing trip. It's one of those habits whose practical benefit might be debatable, but which make me sleep soundly the night before I set sail.

There are few unbreakable rules in Nausikaä. One of them is that the chart work is done below deck. Steering is done at the helm in the cockpit. In other words, when you're at the helm it's not the right time to decide where to go, only how to get there.

For years I didn't have an electronic chartplotter in the cockpit. I had (and still have as a backup) a tablet that I can take to the wheel, with a navigation app, in my case Navionics. I also have a Panasonic Toughbook with OpenCPN.

My habit is as follows:

First: I define the route and waypoints in the Toughbook in OpenCPN. Waypoints (WPs hereinafter) are intermediate points, reference milestones on the map spaced between the starting and finishing points of any route. The purpose of having WPs is to measure progress and control the course changes required by the route.



PLAN DE NAVEGACIÓN

RIBADEO TO CORUÑA

0	1	Rib exit	43 33.1	07 01.8	320	start
1	2	F Pauda	43 33.7	07 02.5	308	00:15
2	3	Bovela	43 42.7	07 18.5	292	04:00
3	4	Roucadoiva	43 45.9	07 29.6	285	06:00
4	5	Coelleiro	43 47.2	07 35.4	294	07:00
5	6	Bares	43 49.4	07 42.7	262	08:30
6	7	Ortegal	43 48.4	07 52.2	243	10:00
7	8	Candeeira	43 43.1	08 06.3	242	13:00
8	9	Delgado	43 38.5	08 19.2	210	15:15
9	10	Pta Cesino	43 30.7	08 25.3	156	17:30
10	11	Wayp Entry	43 29.4	08 22.7	166	18:45
11	12	N Channel	43 24.5	08 22.7	182	19:15
12	11	Coruña	43 21.8	08 22.2	—	20:00

Refuge Viveiro

0	1	Roucadoiva			252	+ 2 hours
1	2	Viv Approach	43 44.6	07 35.1	222	+ 1 hour
2	3	Viv Entry	43 41.0	07 36.3	192	+ 1 hour

Refugo ESTACA DE BARES

0	1	Bares			222	
1	2	Lisieiras	43 43.7	07 49.9	180	+ 2 hours
2	3	Buchos E	43 43.1	07 48.9		

Refugo CEDEIRA

0	1	Candeeira			155	
1	2	CED entry	43 40.1	08 04.9	165	+ 1 hour
2	3	CED harb	43 39.3	08 04.6	—	+ 30 mins

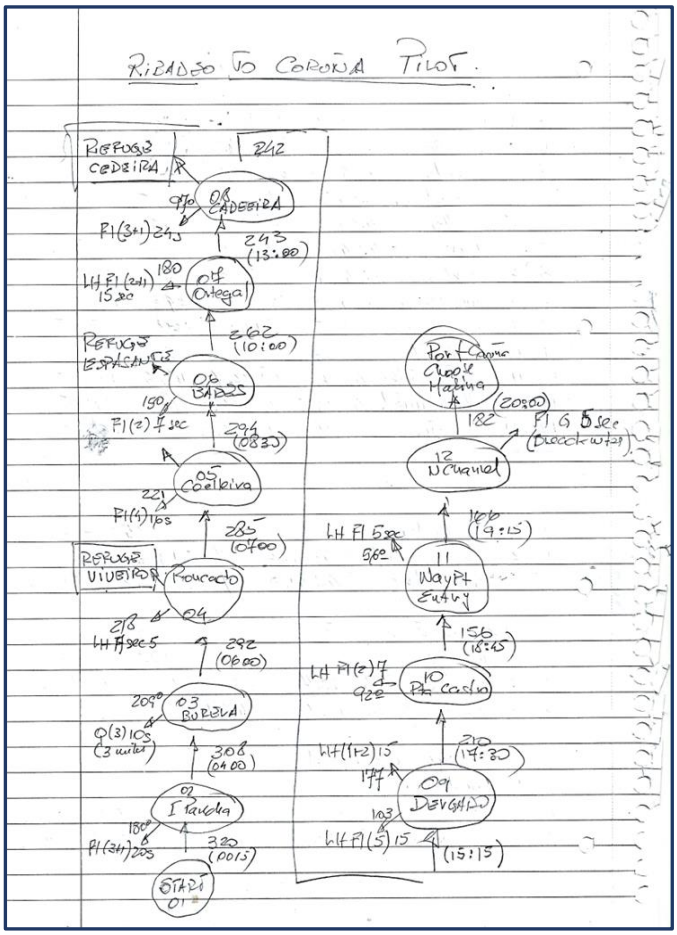
Navigation plan from Ribadeo to a Coruña

Once defined, I print them out or copy them by hand on paper. The data for each WP is as follows:

(a) number (arbitrary)
(b) name – usually referring to some easily recognizable feature on the chart and on the ground.
(c) latitude to one decimal place of a minute
(d) longitude – same
(e) compass course to the next WP
(f) estimated time of arrival at the next WP

In this transcript I include the total route as well as the detours to possible refuges along the way.

Second: I enter -by hand- the coordinates of each WP on the tablet or chartplotter. This process could be automated. I don´t do it for two reasons. On the one hand, automation makes you confident that you haven't made any mistakes. In the event of error, all automation achieves is to ensure the transfer of the error from one platform to the other.



Pilot Plan from Ribadeo to A Coruña

but it also contains additional information that helps me estimate my position without looking at the GPS. The data are:

(a) WP number (sequential)
(b) name of the WP
(c) compass course to the following WP
(d) estimated time (or number of hours after departure) of arrival at the next WP
(e) One or two bearings – preferably two, three if the acceptable margin of error is very narrow – to lights, buoys, lighthouses, terrain features, or any easily identifiable feature on the nautical chart and on the ground.

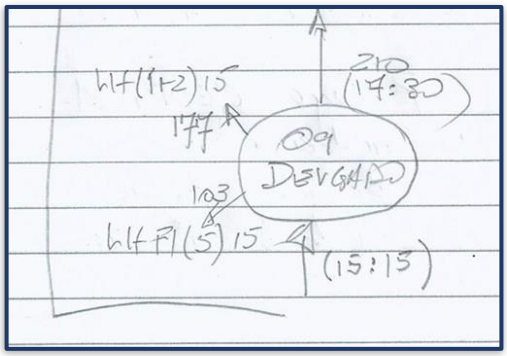
On the other hand, it is not unusual for me to discover differences in the data, especially bathymetric data, between nautical charts from different providers.

In OpenCPN I have raster charts from the Admiralty. On the plotter I have vector charts from Navionics and C-Map.

Manually transcribing the coordinates of each WP forces me to make sure there are no errors or discrepancies between different charts at the same scale, and to edit and correct the coordinates if there are. As I said, such differences are not uncommon, even in places and at scales where the charts are updated on a regular basis.

Third: once the route and the WPs have been transferred to the plotter, I build – on paper – a Pilot plan, i.e. a "roadmap", like that of rally co-drivers.

The purpose of this paper plan is to be able to pilot Nausikaä without having to rely on the plotter ([2]). It's actually a condensed version of the navigation plan,



Illustrative segment of the Pilot plan

By way of example, in the Ribadeo to Coruña Pilot plan, the reference to the Cabo Delgado WP in the plan contains the following information:

[2] Note: Now, I only make pilot plans for night or very complex day passages, and to those places where I have never been to. During the voyage described in this writing I made them for all passages, day and night, and all the places we were going to were unknown to me.

(a) 09, (b) Delgado (Cape), (c) 210º compass, (d) 15:15 hours since departure, (e) code that means the following: “at 103º compass, lighthouse, flashing 5 short, continuous, every 15 second, at 177º compass, lighthouse, flashing 2 short + 1 long, every 15 seconds.

¿¿Capísh??

In the Queen´s English: if after 15:15 hours of navigation I see a light at 103 degrees on the compass, flashing 5 times in a row every 15 seconds, and at **the same time** I see another light at 177 degrees on the compass, flashing 2 short + 1 long every 15 seconds, I am quite sure that I am in the vicinity of the WP Delgado, and that I now have permission to change the course of Nausikaä to 210 degrees on the compass, for a period of time of 1:15 hours, and I anticipate arriving at the next WP 17:30 hours after the departure. And I know all that without having to leave the helm and go below to the navigation table to consult the map!

I have a waterproof paper notepad on board (the paper is made with cotton fibres instead of cellulose, like old bank notes) where I transcribe these Pilot plans, so that I can have it clipped to a board next to the wheel without fear of losing the information if it gets wet.

A very logical and natural question would be: What is the purpose of all this extra work?

The purpose is manifold. It forces me to study and, to some extent, memorize the route, its characteristics, obstacles, and the reason why WPs are where they are and not somewhere else. Consequently, I am forewarned and alert to possible deviations and unforeseen events, and I can anticipate course corrections without reference to GPS. It is also a security element in the event of technology failure, regardless of how many backups I have on board.

Offshore, where there are no fixed landmarks or obstacles, this matters relatively little. For coastal sailing, where there are fixed obstacles and the equation contains many variables (changing winds, tides, currents, drift, etc.) it matters much more.

I insist that in no way do I want to preach good practice with any of the above. All this is only my way of doing things. It is, after all, nothing more than a plan, a divination exercise on paper, and there isn´t a plan that survives contact with reality.

Still, as they say, *failing to plan is planning to fail!*

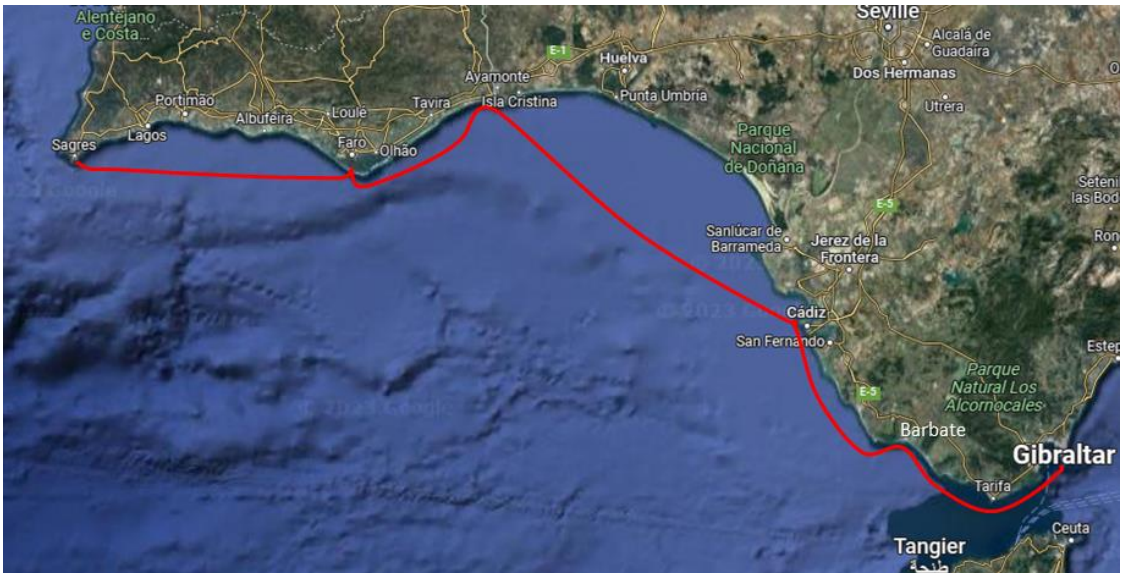
Steering a sailboat is as much an art as it is a science. Personally, there are few things I enjoy more than sailing at night, with the moon and stars for company, and compass, clock, and binoculars as the only instruments. Almost like they used to do it in the old times.

EASTWARD BOUND

A different kind of sailing from now on. New conditions, seas, wind regimes, ports of call and refuges. A different kind of cruising altogether. Two winds blow on the approaches to the Gibraltar Straight: the *Levante* from the east, and the *Poniente* from the west. That´s it! We were chasing the sunrise and had to ride the Poniente to get to Gib and continue east to *Torrevieja*. Both winds, when they set on, are relentless, and as the coast of Europe and Africa get nearer to one-another, the wind funnels into the Strait with ferocity from either side.

We were somewhat late in the season. Should have been there a month before. From mid-August onwards and to the end October, the *Levante* becomes the dominant wind. If we were not lucky, we may have to close-haul all the way to Torrevieja!

Well, let´s get to Gibraltar first. Then we shall see.



Initially we planned the route from Sagres to Gibraltar with four stops: at Cape *Santa Maria*, *Isla Cristina* (just east of the *Guadiana* River mouth and already inside Spain), *Cádiz*, and then *Barbate* before getting through the straights. In the end we had an additional unscheduled stop in *Villamoura* in the *Algarve*. 250 NM in total.

We left Sagres the following morning early with a light onshore breeze and headed for Cape *Santa María* and the entrance to the *Faro* lagoon. We motorsailed for the first half of the day, but by early afternoon it was clear we had a problem. The engine kept on misfiring and sputtering. It didn´t die completely, but it was not running smoothly.

I am only an amateur mechanic, but by the way the engine behaved, my diagnosis was a clogged fuel filter. I had serviced the engine in Baiona, in Spain, before sailing south, replacing both primary and secondary fuel filters, and the oil filter. Unless we loaded contaminated fuel in Cascais, I could not understand how that problem could have arisen.

One thing was evident though, whatever the actual problem was, I could not fix it under way at sea, I had to be in port. While planning this passage, our designated refuge was *Albufeira*, but we had

already left *Albufeira* behind to port and neither of us wanted to undo the progress we had already made.

After a hurried consultation of the CA and Imrai cruising guides, we decided to head for Villamoura, a large marina with good facilities, and adjacent to the town of *Quarteira*. If we needed spare parts for the engine, that was the place to get them. We entered Villamoura just before sunset. The marina office assigned to us a mooring right at the very end of the main pier.

Villamoura is a purpose-built yacht basin with apartment blocks and shopping arcades all around. Being right at the base of the pier, we were in a glass fishbowl, under the gaze of all the residents of the tiny flats in their tiny balconies and the shoppers walking about on the water´s edge. The whole setup is designed like the inside of a casino, to attract people and make them spend money, nothing more. Not a particularly comfortable place.

Villamoura marina. A glass fish bowl

No matter, we were not there to do tourism! I left the diagnostic and repair job for the following morning; too late to start that very evening. Also, once I take the companionway steps off to get into the engine compartment and get my tools out, there is no room to breathe inside Nausikaä's cabin. I wanted Joanna out of my way for a few hours so I could make a good mess below deck without interference!

I was dreading the thought that the problem may be contaminated fuel. If that turned out to be the root-cause of the problem, I would have to syphon 70 litres of diesel out of the steel tank into jerry cans, dispose of it, and then have the fuel tank washed of all the muck accumulated over years at the bottom of it. The whole job could take days!

Puffing and grunting in the heat and darkness of the engine compartment and wriggling on top of the engine like a snake, I managed to take out and clean the already clean primary and secondary fuel filters, and bleed the fuel pipes of any air that may have creeped in. I did replace the old filters' rubber seals, though they looked ok and serviceable.

At the end of all that, the engine started again at first contact. I left it running on idle for an hour to make sure that all trapped air had circulated through the system. By late-afternoon that day, after cleaning up, putting tools away, and ventilating the cabin from all the toxic fumes (some of the fuel had leaked into the bilge and I had to manually pump out the sludge and rinse with clean water) we were ready to set sail again.

Right! Shower first, and then let´s find us a beer or three and some supper!

We left for Cape *Santa María* the following morning a first light, with a light offshore breeze. Windy predicted a variable Poniente between 5 and 10 knots. That forecast actually meant very little, and nothing near to the coast, as the onshore-offshore wind pattern takes precedence, and the local geography determines the wind dynamics. No global weather model can accurately forecast in that scenario.

We had a very pleasant, lazy sail during the morning. As expected, after lunchtime the wind veered offshore and freshened up to about 10-12 knots. We arrived at the mouth of the lagoon on schedule two hours before the top of the tide at about 16:00 and squeezed through the entrance easily, carried by the tide.

The lagoon is really a very large wetland, fenced off from the ocean by a long wandering-dune island. We did not know exactly where we would stay the night. A few miles upstream to the west the channel leads to *Faro*, to the east, to *Olhão*. Both are very interesting places, lots of ancient history to them and certainly worth a touristic visit. However, conscious that we were already running late in the season to catch favourable winds through the Gibraltar Strait, Joanna and I decided to give both a miss and continue east without delay, so we dropped the hook on top of a mud bank in 6 meters of water about a mile from the lighthouse on *Ilha do Farol*. There was no protection from the wind there, but the holding was firm, and we did not expect a blow that night anyway. Departure was set at the following hight tide at 06:00.

Last stop in Portugal. Left: At anchor on the Faro lagoon, the entrance is barely visible in the background. Right: Sunrise over the lagoon.

My goodness, what a different setting to the previous evening in Villamoura! The salt marshes are desolate, lonely, beautiful, the wind and the chirping of the terns darting in the air are the only sounds to be heard.

We had a fantastic, clear, quiet evening that day, Nausikaä gently moving with the tide. The only mayor source of light pollution were the towns of Faro and Olhão, miles away from us, so the night sky was overwhelming with stars. Joanna prepared dinner and we shared the last bottle of white *Alentejo* left in the galley.

I got up twice during the night to check on the anchor. Quite unnecessarily really, nothing to report, we had not moved an inch. Those are the evenings on the hook that I like!

The following morning, we weighed anchor with a huge yellow sun peeping over the crest of the sand dunes and were on our way. Coming out of the lagoon mouth early on the ebb was a bit bumpy; the current was quite strong creating some turbulence over the sand bank, but once out, we headed ENE towards *Isla Cristina*, *Cádiz*, and Spain.

Good-bye Portugal. You were good to us, fed us well and treated us kindly. Thank you. We´ll be back!!

¡Joé que Caló!

Damn it´s hot! in Andalusian vernacular.

From Isla Cristina, where we stopped for 24 hours after Cabo Santa Maria (which was the time required to formalize our entry into Spain with immigration and customs), we decided to sail at night.

Windy and AEMET predicted a dead calm in the Gulf of Cadiz for three days. Dead calm; 65 nautical miles at the helm under the sun... Our neighbour at the marina of Isla Cristina--a resident of *Mazagón* a few miles further east along the coast-- told us: "*The Virazón rises in the afternoon at 15 knots, from the SW, until sunset every day of summer*." Ah.... once again, nothing like local knowledge!

We departed from Isla Cristina at 16:30 on August 22nd, with a cool breeze on the beam, and good light to dodge the *almadrabas* and spot other fishing gear.

Almadrabas are structures made up of large floating rafts anchored to the bottom of the sea and arranged like a sieve. Nets hang from the structure, that catch bluefin tuna on their migration between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. They are permanent --or semi-- structures that can cover a large area, and usually marked with lit cardinal buoys. Most of them appear on nautical charts.

Despite this, I was cautious. My charts were already two years old and the *almadrabas* can change position from one year to the next, or new ones appear.

Our route through the Gulf of Cadiz took us about 15 miles offshore, out of the area of almadrabas and other obstacles, so sailing at night on the engine should be, in principle, less risky. The plan was to arrive in Cadiz with daylight so we could enter the port with enough light and good visibility. The bay of Cadiz is big and has a lot of stuff; You have the naval base of Rota on the left, Puerto Sherry and Puerto de Santa María in the centre, and of course the city of Cadiz on the right. Lots of lights in the background and lots of sea traffic; It's easy to get disoriented and lose sight of the flashing lights of the cardinal buoys in the access channel.

By sunset we had covered 28 miles of the total distance and had lost sight of the coast. We had an excellent night sailing, with clear skies, calm seas, and a light breeze astern that pushed us at 4 knots. I didn't mind going slowly, I wasn't in a hurry. A luxury night to look up at the sky.

Halfway there, we pass a couple of fishing pod buoys very close. But VERY close, let's say 5 meters! So I decided to turn on the radar.

Gádesh

"Joé, que caló!" An African heat, of salt and kalima. A heat of Cadiz at the end of August, in the low forties.

Cadiz is a labyrinthine, treeless city with narrow, shady streets, even narrower sidewalks, and irregular shaped squares that betray its ancient origin. Not a comfortable place for claustrophobes like me.

It is difficult to imagine the stamp of the Phoenicians who founded Gadair (or Gádesh) three thousand years ago, but their motivations were very clear. Cadiz, then an island in a huge bay framed with salt marshes and sand dunes, was the best and most defensible natural refuge for flat-bottomed bireme galleys, which had to row until they ran aground on the beach to load and unload merchandise. So clever were the Tyrians in their choice of location that Cadiz remains today the oldest constantly inhabited city of Europe.

From then on, Cadiz was and is a gateway of access to empires and civilizations; a mixing sieve and scenario of a thousand cultures. You can see this in the houses' walls, stone arcades, the domes of public buildings, in the cobblestones of pedestrian passages between apartment houses, fronted with narrow wrought iron balconies.

All those dreams, sweat and toil of centuries, perched on the shoulders of other centuries in precarious balance, like the houses cemented on the steps of a theatre!

Cadiz is a strong cocktail, somehow an assault on the harmony of the senses, and by being so, it is unrepeatable and irreplaceable.

Joanna and I were left thirsty and wanting another drink!

I'm fortunate to have a good radar on board; a B&G Broadband 4G. Still, the technology isn't very smart. It shows you targets, with different colours depending on the density of the object and the distance, but no other info. The rest depends on your interpretation of what you see on the screen.

Images of Cadiz. Clockwise up: The cathedral from the pier at the Puerta de la Caleta. La Caleta, through an embrasure in the castle of Santa Catalina. The Municipal Palace. One of the streets leading to Plaza Candelaria, in the centre of the old city.

On two occasions that night, with the gadget set at the highest resolution on the screen —a 1/4-mile circle— the radar showed me a small target right in front of me a few feet away. Small enough to be a fishing pod buoy. Twice that night I turned Nausikaä violently to port and starboard to avoid the obstacle that I saw was within a few feet of my bow. All to miss the target and see it no longer on the screen, only to find it anew a few hundred meters ahead, and again right in front of my bow!

I was beginning to doubt my sanity when I realized that the target I saw on the screen was nothing more than the shadow of my own mainmast. There was no way to avoid that ghost permanently in front of me!

Idiot!! Oh well… One learns something new every day...

We arrived early in Cadiz, still in the dark, and moored at the marina *Puerto América*, with the harbourmaster (on the VHF) and the port´s pilot boat (shouting angrily) hurrying us up to get out of the way of a container ship that was about to leave.

No Matter, it was a fantastic night and a unique experience. Every night is.

I think we'll be in Cadiz for several days. The Levante is blowing furiously in Gibraltar. We must wait for it to subside and change to Poniente to try to cross the Strait. Better in Cadiz than in Tarifa. Or anywhere else! So thought the merchants of Tyro. Now we think so too!

Centuries perched on the shoulders of other centuries! The amphitheatre built by Lucius Cornelius Balbus for the men of Cádiz in 70 BC under the houses of other men of today.

We stayed in Cadiz for four days, waiting for the wind to change in the Strait. Eventually, on August 26th we decided to make our way eastwards, with no clear indications of a westerly that would take us to Gibraltar. From Cadiz the shortest route is 75 nautical miles. At an average speed of 5 knots, that distance represents 15 hours of sailing, i.e. two tides.

The tidal dynamics in the Strait are complex. Tides are not symmetrical; flood tides from the Atlantic being up to three hours longer than ebb tides from the Mediterranean. In consequence, the currents are of unequal velocity, and – something counterintuitive--increase in speed from the middle of the Strait towards the European and African shores.

After spending a whole morning sweating in Nausikaä´s cabin with the computer, the cruising guides and the tide atlas on the table, interpolating winds, currents and average speeds, my conclusions were as follows: Firstly, we were too far away from the action to execute any plan. With the weather conditions that AEMET predicted, it was foolish to rely on the constancy of any wind beyond a 24-hour forecast. Secondly, we had spring tides towards the end of August with strong currents (4 to 7 knots over the European coast), so it was impossible to sail against the tide and make good progress, even with the wind in our favour. Thirdly, any scenario that predicted wind ***against*** tide was tantamount to climbing into a washing machine.

To the southeast of Cadiz there are two landfalls where we could wait for the right conditions: *Barbate*, a fishing port with a marina, easily accessible and offering protection in all weather conditions, and *Tarifa*. Tarifa is a small fishing port where passenger ferries call that make the crossing of the Strait to Moroccan ports. Port moorings are closed to recreational vessels except in an emergency. The only refuge in Tarifa for us with a Levante is a narrow anchorage in the lee of Tarifa island, a low rocky promontory that offers little protection from the wind and none from the sea. The distance between Barbate and Tarifa is 23 NM, i.e. easy to cover in less than one tide. We therefore decided to set sail for Barbate and wait there for the for the right conditions.

The opportunity would come about on August 30th. AEMET promised us a constant SW at about 12 knots. On that day, high tide in the Strait would occur at 05:30. We would have to make the crossing during the night.

Departure from Barbate on the way to Gibraltar

We left Barbate on the 29th at sunset with the intention of rounding the cape at Tarifa with the rising tide, then running with the flood tide all the way to the bay of *Algeciras*. Once inside the bay the tidal current decreases and we could decide then, based on the local wind, where to find moorings.

We had a wonderful night of sailing, with a full moon that appeared high in the sky as soon as the sun set and accompanied us until shortly before we reached Tarifa. Joanna and I had arranged the watches so that she would be at the helm in the passage through Tarifa, and I would relieve her in the transit of the strait.

I had charted a course on the chart to round Tarifa with a wide margin of safety; in case of encountering unexpected currents and to be able to comfortably avoid the traffic of the fast ferries that ply the route to Morocco. The corresponding *WP* was located at approximately one and a half miles from the Island of Tarifa. With that plan in place, I went below and lay down on the bunk to sleep until it was time for my watch.

After so many days at sea (since Brest, we had been living onboard for two months) one develops a sixth sense --perhaps more than one-- dedicated to the perception of everything related to the behaviour of the boat. Motion, noises, even the timbre of the creaking of Nausikaä's wooden furniture conveys information, and with a little practice, one tunes into that bandwidth to absorb and interpret information subliminally, without thinking or noticing.

Well, "something" woke me up half an hour before the alarm went off. This was already unusual. As I always do, I climbed to the cockpit to scan the horizon. The Tarifa lighthouse loomed tall and menacingly to my left, and I could distinctly hear the thunder of the surf braking on the island. We were about three hundred meters from the rocks.

For some reason, better known to her than to me, Joanna had strayed from the course on the *plotter* and allowed the drift to take us --dangerously in my opinion-- close to the island of Tarifa. We were doing then 5 knots SOW, but 11 knots SOG, carried by the tide at 6 knots. At these speeds there is minimal response time to unforeseen events.

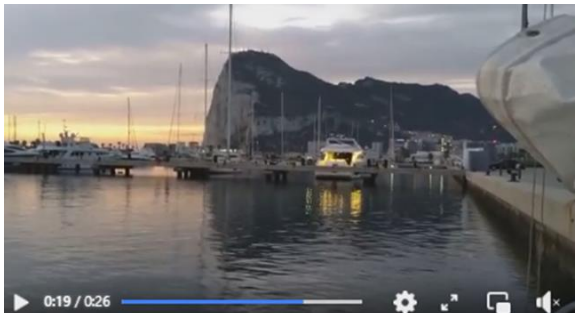
With a grunt of annoyance (I confess!) towards my sailing companion, I took the helm earlier than I was supposed to and for the remainder of the voyage. Joanna, somewhat offended, went below to sleep.

We were ahead of schedule. It was only 2:15 a.m. Past Tarifa and with the lighthouse behind me, the horizon on the port side was a wall of impenetrable darkness, the starboard one was the centre of Tokyo at night. The contrast couldn't be starker! The lights of Tangier can be seen in the dome of the sky, but the city itself lies below the horizon. However, Tangier's two major trading ports are located in the narrowest part of the Strait, barely 8 miles wide, clearly visible and lit up like a Christmas tree. I could make out, against the background light, the dark silhouette of the large freighters and container ships sailing in the middle of the channel.

On the port side on the other hand, it was like staring into a black hole. On the Spanish side, the entire area around the Strait of Gibraltar is a natural park (*Los Alcornocales*), without any towns or other sources of light. On the port side I could barely make out the dim red and green navigational lights of small fishing boats.

In planning the passage for that day, I was a bit sad to miss the spectacular views offered by the crossing of the Strait. I was a fool. The night provided a unique and unforgettable experience. We would see *Gib-al-Tariq* and *Jebel Musa*, the two pillars of Hercules, the next morning!

Gibraltar



Gibraltar from La Línea at dawn

This is how I described our arrival to Gib on FB. I think it sums up what Joanna and I felt that early morning:

"Gibraltar at dawn, after an extraordinary night of sailing. We departed from Barbate shortly before sunset, rounded Tarifa at 02:00 with the tide, and arrived at La Línea at 05:30. We missed the scenic spectacle of the Strait crossing, but the night had so many other charms!

From Lowestoft to Gibraltar... I haven't done the maths yet, but it's about 2,500 nautical miles sailed since then. In this walnut shell with masts! We're still, Joanna and I, running on adrenaline. Tonight, we shall rest. Tomorrow will bring the impressions and emotions of actually being here, of having completed the task and lived the adventure, of having done what we set out to do, no matter how crazy and impossible the whole project seemed at the beginning.

Hail to the Helmwoman! who has steered us with talent, skill, and caution, through the easy sailing and the not so easy too. Hail to the Navigator! who charted feasible and efficient courses, avoiding obstacles, dangers, and delays. Hail to Uncle Herreshoff, who designed this masted walnut shell that carried us, in comfort and safety, through all those 2,500 nautical miles.

Cheers to all the friends and family who participated, through this medium, in our tribulations, joys, and wonders. Your comments, a simple "like", made worth the effort of the boring and frustrating hours of rain, wind, and contrary seas, and all the more enjoyable all the other hours. A huge THANK YOU for the moral support and affection shown!

Now, let's rest, because I haven't slept a wink in 24 hours. 👍😎"

It's hard to communicate my impressions of that place and that morning. Watching the Rock emerge at night from the sea with the sun behind it is breathtaking. No wonder the ancient Greeks who saw it for the first time assigned to Hercules the task of turning that place into reality. We had moored at the waiting dock of the *Alcaidesa* marina in *La L*ínea. Still in the dark, waiting for the people from the marina to show up, I sat on the dock, nibbling on a piece of *serrano* ham (a.k.a. prosciutto) bought the day before in Barbate, and drinking a cold beer (at six o'clock in the morning!) from a vending machine next to the port office, trying to absorb both the scenery and the meaning of being there, beholding that scenery.

When I decided to sail from the UK to Spain two years earlier, my destination was always Gibraltar. It was the gateway to the Mediterranean. All that lay to the east of Gibraltar could be ascribed to some other adventure, to a future life that at that moment was still barely dreamed of and yet to be defined. The Rock had the FINISH LINE flag painted on the limestone in all the colours of the rainbow. Now we were banging on its door and crying out to be let in!

Finally, with the sun already rising, Joanna and I lay down to rest, exhausted from all the emotions. At noon we were awakened by a knocking on the roof of the cabin. The marina people wanted to know what was going on; They tried to shake us out of our slumber earlier on but got no response.

Rest in La Linea for a few days. From Cape St. Vincent in Portugal, we knew that summer was coming to an end and the westerly winds were becoming unreliable; henceforth, the Levante would be more frequent, more intense and for longer duration. Consequently, we had sailed somewhat against the clock, seizing every possible opportunity, even suboptimal, to make progress eastward. Now we were at the door of our destination. From now on, our cruising would take on a different character. The Levante would be ubiquitous and always blowing on our bow, but once on the other side of the rock, there was no more hurry than our own. Whether we arrived in Torrevieja on one date or another date was of no great import. It was the Mediterranean! We would have fine weather well into the fall. If we wanted to go sightseeing or stay at anchor in a secluded cove for any number of days, so be it!

La Línea is a pleasant town, abundant in restaurants, tapas bars, and typical Andalusian taverns. During those hot days, we got into the habit at sunset, of the *clarita* (a shandy; equal parts of beer and lemonade), olives, and *pescaíto frito* (fried whitebait) in these taverns, sitting at wrought iron tables on the sidewalk and enjoying the comparative cool of the twilight air.

Top and centre: Monument to Wladislaw Sikorsky at Europa Point, the southernmost end of the Rock. Below, the lighthouse of Europa Point, with Jebel Musá on the African side.

We visited Gibraltar twice, once for sightseeing, and the second time to go shopping. Gibraltar is an overseas territory and exempt from both British and EU taxes. I had been there a couple of times in the past, but it was a novelty to Johanna.

It was very interesting, and I would say emotional for Joanna being Polish, to visit the memorial monument to *Wladislaw Sikorsky* in Punta Europa. Sikorsky, a national hero, was Poland's prime minister in exile during World War II, commander-in-chief of Polish forces, and a military aviator. He died in Gibraltar in a plane crash in 1943.

We also climbed laboriously the south top of the rock to appreciate the views of the Strait. A Herculean effort that left us exhausted and sweaty, even if the last 30-meter stretch was in an elevator. But it was worth it! The scenery is truly spectacular.

You can see from there not only the surroundings of the Rock, but the entire distance through the Strait and a good part of the African coast. Something really wonderful. The sky was covered with flocks of migratory birds; storks and flamingos, which move through the strait every year in late summer and early spring using the thermal air currents that form on land on both sides.

We stayed on top of the rock for as long as we could, until the wind threatened to knock us down and return us to the bay by the shortest route.

One afternoon we walked through the village of La Linea to the Mediterranean, to see the rock in all its glory. A hike of almost 3 km there and as many back, but well worth it.

The Levante was not stopping. It did not prevent us from sailing, of course, but the Strait acts as a funnel for the wind from either side, particularly in the vicinity of the rock. We would have a bumpy ride close hauled and with a head-on swell.

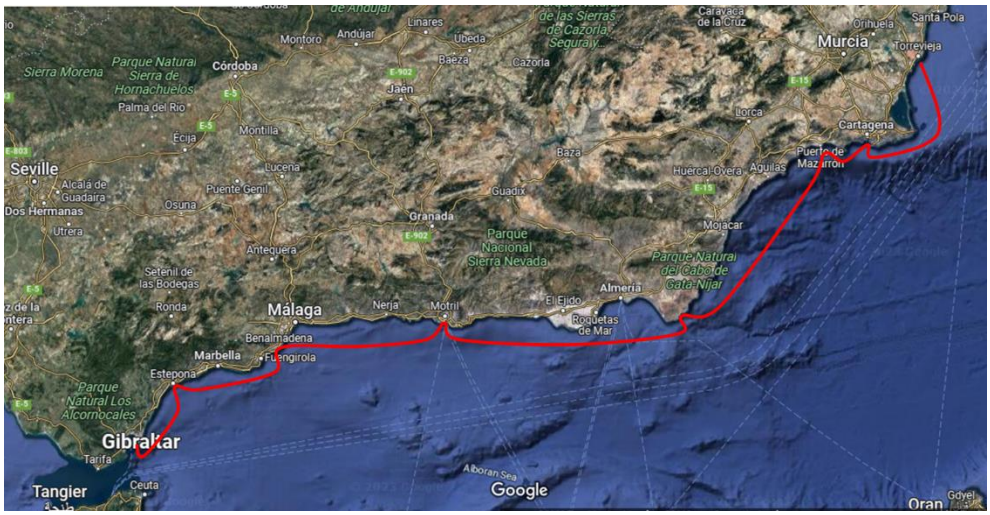
At last, a week after our arrival, AEMET forecasted a light breeze from the SE. It was the best we could hope for; we had to take advantage of the opportunity!

Above, Gibraltar from the Mediterranean side of La Linea. Below: View from the top of the Rock of Gibraltar looking North

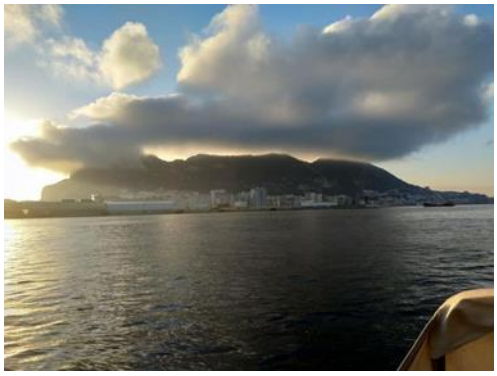
MARE NOSTRUM

And it wasn't even theirs! Or rather, it belonged to others for many years before them, and then for many years after. But the name stuck. The Romans knew how to do branding.

This was no longer the North Sea, moody and inhospitable. It was no longer the Atlantic, unpredictable and untamed. This was something else. What could we expect, I wondered, that innumerable others have not already seen since time immemorial. What new surprises could this sea have in store, for three thousand years a prisoner of lands and of men?



Our sailing plan took us from Gibraltar to Torrevieja, about 300 NM or so as the crow flies, with four planned stopovers: Estepona, Motril, San Jose, Cartagena, and finally our destination Torrevieja. As always, sailors' plans are written in the wet sand at low tide.



Goodbye Gibraltar! You've been a wonderful host, but we've tarried here for too long. It's time to head east.

We had to be flexible, both regarding the winds as well as the touristic stops. As I said, the hurry was over, and some stopovers became almost compulsory; somewhere on the *Costa del Sol* to restock water, fuel, and provisions, Motril, to visit the beautiful city of Granada, some deserted coves on the coast of Almeria that looked idyllic in *Google Maps*, and Cartagena, of course.

All this, however, was subject to the provisions of Aeolus. If a good Poniente was blowing, we had to take advantage of it, tourism a lesser priority. If the Levante lost its composure, then we had to seek shelter wherever we could.

We left La Linea on 07 September early in the morning with a light SE forecasted for the entire day. The route to Estepona took us in a NE direction, so I was confident that we would be able to cover the distance of just over 30 NM to Estepona in a single tack.

Still, the exit from the Bay of Algeciras was done on the engine; the formidable mass of the Rock affects the wind patterns making them unpredictable.

Once east of Punta Europa (the southern tip of the Gibraltar peninsula), the wind settled from the SE, and we had a wonderful sailing at an average of 4 knots to Estepona; very hot, clear skies, light breeze and binoculars in hand for a good part of the journey, spotting bluefin tuna jumping on the surface, dolphins, and even a couple of whales two cables away.

Estepona lighthouse

I was thinking... yes, this was what I imagined of the Mediterranean, like in Serrat's song!

The clear image in my mind with which I had left England over a year before, the image which, insinuating itself, had stalked my dreams ever since I bought Nausikaä six years before, was there, before me; in the warmth of the sun on my shoulders, the sea of unimaginable indigo blue, the reflection of light in the water and the smell in the air. It was there as if there was nothing to it, as if it were mundane matter of course, undeserving of any wonder.

What is a lighthouse?

It is a navigational aid. Yes, of course, but then again, isn't it also so much more than that?

On the dark nights at sea, nothing is constant. Every indication can also be a deception. The water plays tricks on you. It reflects your navigation lights, in fleeting flashes of red and green, out of the corner of your eye, on the crest of a wave, on the rolling wake of your bow.

But there's nothing there except the anxious breath of your imagination. Beyond here, there be monsters...

The stars will shift, they will rise and fall. The moon, inconstant, will set. The lights, afar and dim, will make you wonder where the horizon really is, and how far away, in the empty panorama before you. In this bubble of hollow darkness, the only sure thing is the soft light of the compass, showing you the way.

And then you see it. It's like the greeting, arm raised in the distance, from a dear and missed friend. It is the smile the girl you like gives you, out of nothing, as a spontaneous gift. You see the wink of the lighthouse and the spell is conjured. The monsters retreat to the depths. Proportions become again part of the fabric of the universe. The horizon takes its rightful place in it, and like on the second day, the waters separate from the heavens.

You focus on the song of that hypnotic light. The rhythm of this one is: "short-short-long", every seven seconds. You whisper under your beath: "One one-thousand, Two one-thousand… Yep!... That's the one! You look at the compass. You look at your watch. You remember the course you laid, the day before, on the chart. Yep!... more or less where it should be, more or less at the right time. Give or take.

And now, your place is once again secure in the dark bubble. Your position in this universe of deceiving lights and declining stars is, once again, certain and true. Things kind of make sense again.

Is it time for the next watch yet? Maybe I should go below and brew a cuppa.

Oh, dear me! What a danger! What a disservice would I be doing to the Mediterranean, to Joanna, to myself, if I were to conveniently and complacently forget the leaden skies, the waves like hills, the impenetrable fog of the North Sea, the English Channel, the Portuguese Atlantic. Get your act together Rafa and appreciate what you see and what you have in its true value, second by second!

We arrived in Estepona in the late afternoon, a bit of sunstroked, but happy, and moored in the excellent marina there, among large sailboats that, by all accounts, had not moved from their mooring in years.

Estepona

My advice to all those who are planning the same journey and look for a mooring on the Costa del Sol: forget *Puerto Banús, Marbella, Fuengirola, Benalmadena*.[3] Head for Estepona!

Views of the historic town centre of Estepona at night

Estepona's "historic" town centre (I'll explain the quotation marks in a sec) is an enchanted place of cobbled streets, sloping fountains that whisper in the passages between houses, and houses with wooden arcades, wrought-iron balconies adorned with pots of geraniums and carnations, and with palms, orange, lemon and olive trees on every corner and in every square. It is unthinkable to imagine a more Andalusian space than these streets of shy and elusive lights and shadows. Maybe the neighborhood of *Santa Cruz* in Seville, but little else that I have seen. There are no shop signs or billboards (except pharmacies) to add some neon stridency to the overall feeling of repose, of fresh pause on the arduous road, that this enchanting neighbourhood of Estepona offers.

The word "historic" in quotation marks is approrpiate because, after a short walk and recovered from the astonishment, one realizes that this neighborhood is not very "historic". The magic is deceptive, like Holywood's. Other than the churches spaced out here and there, I doubt that the dwellings, the neighborhood as a whole as it is today, is more than 50 years old. First of all, everything is far too "perfect". Nothing is out of place or unwarranted; neither houses, nor streets, nor courtyards, nor flowers, interrupt the intimate, placid, and carefully studied harmony of the place, which would not be expected in a place that has existed for centuries. The streets are sewered, and even if this was an addition of modern life and sanitation, the cobblestones on the streets do not have a central drainage channel but are smooth and perfectly level. It is possible, indeed certain, that there was an old historic centre in Estepona, but it is not the one of today.

[3] Unless you are a millionaire and want to rub shoulders with Arab sheikhs and Russian oligarchs. And even then, those sites aren't worth it. Not the time, not for the money. Benalmadena is particularly avoidable except in an emergency (as was our case in a similar place: Vilamoura, in the Portuguese Algarve). It's one of those horrible engineering contraptions of the 1980s, which are no longer allowed to exist, and which should have never been allowed then. The builders simply dug a huge meandering deep trench on the wide beach for a yacht harbour and surrounded it with dozens of shops and honeycomb apartment blocks, all with their 1X1 m balconies where there is not enough room to take a deep breath. And they did all this without considering the hydrological conditions and environmental health of the place. The circulation and tidal exchange of water in that hole is poor, and the water in the marina reeks of human waste.

Today's historic centre was imagined, designed, and executed with care and rigid urbanistic discipline to reproduce, pristine and without its ugly bits, a style of community and individual life that no longer exist organically in the 21st century. Whoever did it, did it very well. The illusion endures in every corner and is renewed with with square, even if we know it to be illusory.

Estepona to Motril (via Caleta de Velez) – 100 NM

Our next port of call was Motril, about 100 nautical miles in straight line in a ENE direction. We had a light Levante (10 to 12 knots) from the NE, that is, right on our nose, forcing us to tack upwind and extending the route to an estimated 120 miles. This situation lasted with little change for the ramaining of the way to Torrevieja; dominant gentle easterly winds, occasional and violent westerly winds associated to weather fronts, and then diurnal wind patterns, blowing from the land in the mornings and from the sea in the afternoons until sunset. The nights were dead calm throughout the month of September. This pattern obliged shorter sailing than we would have liked, only when there was wind between sunrise and sunset.

The passage to Motril was uneventful; a very pleasant day and a half of sailing at an average 4 knots. We went a little further offshore from the coast, about 10 miles, to the edge of the 200-meter isobar, to get closer to the steady winds and to be able to make longer tacks.

The nocturnal dead calm found us two-thirds of the way to Motril. Instead of motoring through the night (difficult to sleep and rest in Nausikaa´s cabin with the engine going), Joanna and I decided to set sail for Velez for the night and continue the next day. Velez was our "refuge" on this leg of the trip anyway, so the route was already planned.

The Alhambra of Granada

Motril is a small port located at the end of a breakwater almost two miles long. It is mainly a commercial port with a long dock for bulk freighters. Ferries to Melilla and Ceuta on the African coast also depart from there. The yacht club has three floating pontoons at the end of the dock.

The site doesn't deserve much comment on its own, but stopping there allowed us to make a one day trip to Granada to visit the Alhambra.

"*Al Qal`a al-hamrā*", from which the name *Alhambra* derives, means in classical Arabic "fortress" or "red castle". This is so because of the red clay used as mortar in the walls of the fortress, although the entire construction appears rose gold, red and cinnamon in the evening sun. Initially, it was just that, a castle, a military construction, that successive Nasrid sultans transformed into a garden palace straight out of a tale of the Arabian Nights.

It is impossible for me --even today after many visits-- to walk the enclosures, rooms and courtyards of the Alhambra without ending up comatose by the assault on the senses made by the decorative frenzy. There is literally not a square centimeter of wall, flat roof, or vault that is not covered with graphic elements: in polychromed wood, tile mosaics, carved stone, and calligraphy on plaster. There are no poetic pauses in that rhyme. It takes an iron discipline to be able to focus and pay attention, in the midst of that visual cacophony, to any one aesthetic element in particular.

Until you exit the buildings and step into the gardens of the *Generalife*. There, everything is perspective, everything straight lines, everything exquisite balance in four dimensions, the three dimensions of visual space and a fourth of the sound of water, that runs whispering where it is not

seen, and it is seen only when it is strictly necessary, so to reflect the sky, a colonnade, a vaulted arch. Like a woman who takes off her niqab, furtively and playfully, and only for you.

I'm not an expert in architecture, art, culture, or anything at all Arab. But I can only conclude that the radical aesthetic difference between these two spaces, that of the interior of the buildings and that of their gardens, is not the consequence of chance, or the whim of the man who designed and built them. The contrast is naked in its intentionality, in its compulsion to make us pause in thought.

Views of the Alhambra in Granada. Bottom left: Selfie from the walls of the Alcázar, with the Albaicín neighbourhood in the background.

These were just my musings. Joanna on the other hand, had capitulated from the first instant to the spell. She had entered the time machine and been carried away to the twelfth century, to a world in which there were still genies inside oil lamps and flying carpets around.

We were both tourists in that fantasy world until painful feet and stiff necks from looking up forced us to seek refuge in one of Granada's traditional taverns in the *Plaza de Santa Ana*, at the foot of the fortress. Sitting there, with olives, serrano ham, and *manzanilla* chilled to perfection,[4] I asked Joanna what her impressions of the Alhambra were. Reluctant, Joanna postponed her moment of reflection. She said she needed time to digest everything she had seen. She was equally quiet during the bus ride back to Motril.

Back onboard Nausikaä and preparing for departure the next day, I suggested to Joanna that she put her impressions in writing. She has not yet done so, but I fervently hope that she will someday so that I can add her observations to this account.

[4] This is a sherry wine, honey coloured, dry as the Sahara and with a slight apple-like bouquet, which you can drink very quickly if you are not careful, and it gives you an epic hangover the next day.

Motril to Cartagena – 170 NM

We were in Motril for four days, waiting for the wind to come. Any wind! On September 19th, AEMET predicted a westerly without a weather front for several days. We had to seize the opportunity. Our destination was Cartagena, 170 NM NE. It was unlikely that we could – or want to – make the journey without making landfall somewhere, so my pilot plan included shelters en route, as was my habit.

We left Motril on the morning of the 20th, with a fresh breeze from the west at 14 knots that pushed us happily at 5.5 knots for most of the day. A perfect sailing day; I didn't have to change the sail settings even once. At four o'clock in the afternoon we were begining to cross the Gulf of Almeria.

In this part of the journey, the slope of the underwater floor becomes steeper and the 200-meter isobath (the continental slope) approaches within a few miles of the coast. Trawlers zigzag through there. I wanted to cross the gulf with daylight to keep them in sight. At 9:00 p.m. we had *Cabo de Gata* on the port side. We had done very good time, 75 NM in 14 hours. Probably the best sailing spell of the whole Mediterranean trip so far!

Hoever, night was upon us and we were tired. Probably a bit sunstroked as well. We therefore decided to set sail for *San Jose*, a cove a few miles east of Cabo de Gata, to spend the night there. We arrived in the dark and dropped anchor on sand in front of San José beach. A dip in the dark water, dinner, and rest!



Left. The cove of San José at dawn. centre and right. The Frederic Chopin hoisting sail.

Early the next morning, as we emerged from the cabin, we met the Frederic Chopin. The Chopin is a two-masted brig serving as a training ship for the Polish Navy. A beautiful ship! He must have entered the cove after us, and was now hoisting sail and heading NE, probably to the same destination we had, Cartagena.

Cartagena

We set sail to the NE for Cartagena on the 22nd of September. By 08:30 we had exited the cove and were sailing with a southeasterly at 10 knots, following the wake of the Frederic Chopin, already far off in the horizon. As the crow flies, the passage to Cartagena represented 75 NM; at an average of 5 knots (something we did regularly in the Atlantic), 15 hours of sailing. But on the way from Gibraltar we learned that an average of 5 knots under sail in Nausikaa, in the Spanish Mediterranean at the end of summer, is a rarity and a rather optimistic expectation. The winds are seldom constant in

direction or intensity, and the nights are calm. I therefora estimated the passage in 24 hours at an average of 3 knots.

There was no haste. Cartagena is an important commercial and military port, with considerable traffic. I preferred to approach the bay and enter the harbour with good daylight.

At the break of dawn we were off Mazarrón, about 15 miles east of Cartagena, and with the sun already above the horizon, we were rounding Cape *Tiñoso*.



Left and centre: Rounding Cabo Tiñoso on the way to Cartagena. Right: Preparing breakfast on board under way that day: scrambled eggs, tomatoes, and toast with olive oil!

The landscapes offered by this part of the journey are nothing less than exceptional. Limestone cliffs that plunge into the sea from dizzying heights, and semicircular coves hidden and deserted between the rocky promontories. I had to resist the temptation to suggest to Joanna that we paused our wandering in one of those coves, for a dip, lunch, and a siesta, but although we were not in a hurry, we had to make the most of the good wind.

We came into the bay of Cartagena at 06:15 after a very pleasant and uneventful crossing.

Cartagena was founded by the Carthaginian Hasdrubal Barca, brother-in-law of Hannibal, the one with the elephants, in 227 BC, in an excellent natural bay surrounded by steep cliffs and offering deep waters and protection from all winds.

The bay of Cartagena. Google stock photo

Hasdrubal was not the first. Rumor has it that there was another city on the same site called *Mastia*, belonging to the Tartessians. The caves that pierce the hills surrounding the bay also contain human remains dating back to the Palaeolithic.

We do not know what name Hasdrubal gave to the city he founded. In the Phoenician language, the name sounds like clearing one's throat as the Phoenicians did not write vowels, only consonants. Then, when the Romans chased the Carthaginians out of there, they called it *Cartago Nova*, from which the name Cartagena is derived.

Cartagena is an eclectic city in every conceivable way and meaning of the word. There is imperial neoclassical architecture on the seafront, prefab apartment blocks from the nineteen sixties and seventies on the steep hills that surround the bay, and interspaced between them, empty spaces; large holes in the ground over the edge of which you have to bend to contemplate the ruins of a temple, some public baths, or a Roman mansion paved with mosaics several meters below the level of today´s streets.

Views of Cartagena. From left to right: the Roman amphitheatre, the seafront, the Town Hall. All of sights are found within a 15-minute walk of each other.

As soon as the narrowness of the streets surrounding the bay allows any perspective, the eyes are captured by the great mass of the Roman amphitheatre, with its back to the sea and clinging by its fingernails to the top of a limestone cliff.

Left and centre: Graffiti on the bare median walls of apartment buildings in Cartagena. Right: celebrating being there with a bottle of Cava on the night of our arrival.

The eclectic character of Cartagena's architecture is matched by the diversity of its people, as if to reflect its own history and social personality. Sitting on a bench on the marine promenade in the afternoon sun and gazing at the yachts in the marina, Joanna and I entertained ourselves with a silly game; guess the personal history of every interesting passerby who walked by us. Some proposals: Navy sailor on leave and looking for a girlfriend (evident from the uniform, and the fact he was alone), university history student (ancient history student, judging by the state of the jeans she wore), German tourist (shod with sandals but also wearing socks), banker (in a three-piece, pin-stripe, black suit), illegal immigrant (shouldering a bed sheet by the four corners that held dozens of pairs of sneakers).

Torrevieja

In the morning of September 28 at 08:30 we finally set sail for Torrevieja[5], with a light breeze from the SE and little sea. We rounded *Cabo de Gata* at 11:30 a.m., and from there we ran with the wind just aft of the beam for the next four hours, entering through the mouth of the Torrevieja harbour at 16:30. Walk in the park!

[5] As I write the last words in this story, it was exactly three years ago today.

Organising moorings at the International Marina (where I still am today) took us twenty minutes. After the formalities were attended to, it was time to look for a cool shady spot among the umbrellas of one of the bars facing the marina to celebrate having arrived at our final destination.

Left: Arrival in Torrevieja. Centre and right. That same afternoon, we celebrated the conclusion of our journey with cava.

END OF THE LINE – ALL CHANGE, ALL CHANGE!

It has been three years to the day since I had my first sight of the approaches by sea to Torrevieja, more than five years since I had sailed under the Lowestoft draw bridge for the last time. This is also the time it took me to write this story. It would have been premature, if not inappropriate, to do it any earlier. One needs the perspective that only time offers, and the experiences of a new life in a new country to modulate and contextualise the accumulated memories.

The weeks and months following our arrival were busy. I had to take possession of my pad in San Luis, bought over a year before then, sort all the paperwork required to reside legally in Spain on a permanent basis, explore and get to know the physical and social geography of the village where my life was set to continue for the foreseeable future.

Joanna stayed in Spain for a few more months and would have stayed permanently. However, it soon became evident her business in Poland demanded her undivided and close attention, so she returned to Lodz early the following year.

So, I did what I set out to do. What now?

What do I do now? How do I structure my life so that what is to come will be at least equivalent in vitality, excitement, and wonder to what has gone before? Tall order! However, this can´t, wont, be ***it***, the pinnacle of achievement, the most I could hope for. I´m on a roll now! Other personal challenges must lie ahead, just as demanding, just as endearing and deserving of my wild dreaming. But if I don´t put them there and make them happen, who will?

Well, I am at it, concocting other hairbrained notions, brewing other intoxicating plans. My beloved Nausikaä is moored at the marina, and she does not waste an opportunity to remind me that sailing boats were not built to be tied up to a dock.

Very well gorgeous… Where would you like to go with me tomorrow?