

SOLO TO THE SCILLIES (Part 2)

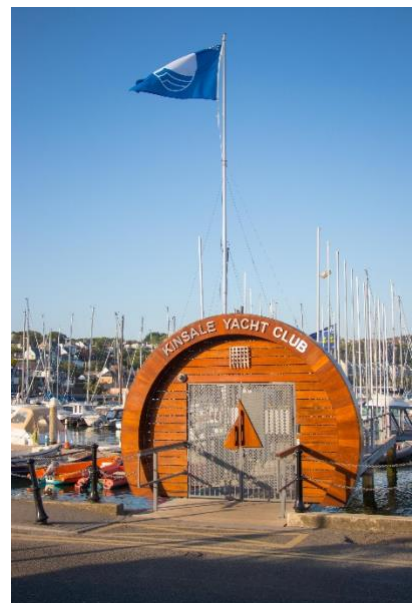
It was a relief to arrive safely in Kilmore Quay after crossing from Milford Haven, and I looked forward to a meal ashore, or at least a drink. It was early evening, with no-one on duty, and a self-locking gate off the pontoon. Dare I go ashore and hope to find someone to let me back onto the pontoon? No. So back to the boat for a scratch dinner. And that drink.

The next day, May 21st, at 07.10 I motored west in a very light SW breeze to the very picturesque estuary (ria ?) of the R Suir then was able to sail gentle the 14M up to Waterford, mooring on the town pontoon close to all the action. There's plenty to see here, so I stayed a couple of days, replenishing gas, but oddly there's no chandler or diesel here. On this, and most, harbour pontoons security is arranged by 'phoning the HM who then gives you a personal code that, whenever entered on one's smartphone, opens the gate : magic. After leaving Waterford, I drifted slowly down and anchored amongst the pastures in the secluded tributary of Kings Channel, listening to the cows and enjoying the scenery.

This southern coast of Ireland has loads of natural harbours, all pretty and very sheltered; heading west for twenty miles is the tidal port of Dungarven, demanding an 06.30 start in order to arrive at HW. Approaching the only pontoon I was politely warned off by locals, as they knew that it would dry, but one offered me his own nearby deep-water mooring for the night, from where I rowed ashore and explored on foot. Then onwards to Youghal, pronounced Yowl, the estuary of the R Blackwater – sounds familiar – to pick-up a mooring in the lee of a sandy spit, but the strong tides convinced me not to try rowing ashore.

On the 25th May I left Youghal at 08.15, in fog, expecting it to lift. The light SE breeze was helpful, but the need to use radar called for the motor to be running, so I motor-sailed along the coast never seeing land; strangely, the sun was warm, but the low fog persisted. After six hours I entered the famous harbour of Kinsale, considered the Cowes of Ireland and probably the most expensive town around. Here there's a superb yacht club, that owns and runs the pontoons, and around the natural harbour are the holiday homes for families from Cork and Dublin. This was the most expensive port on my cruise, but also the best; however, one night was enough so the next night I anchored up the river, for economy and for peace.

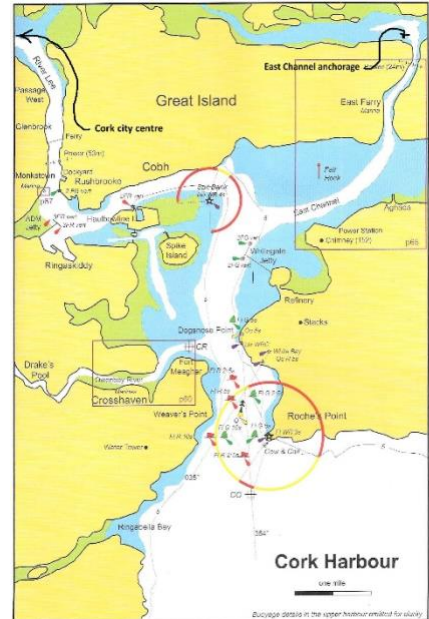
Sat 22nd May, with wind NW-4 and sunshine, gave me a good sail back east after a morning coffee-stop up the pretty Oyster Haven where an enthusiastic stag-party was in nautical mode on rafts and canoes. Then a short hop further east for a couple of nights at Crosshaven, just



Pontoon gate at Kinsale

inside the entrance of the huge Cork Harbour, a popular yachting location giving easy access to the ocean as well as to the sheltered harbor. This is Ireland's naval base, and was the transatlantic liner terminal (from Cobh, as Cork itself was not deep enough) ; Cobh (pronounced "Cove") serving as the last port-of-call for the Titanic, picking up 123 doomed emigrants.

I motored up the winding R Lea to Cork itself, a disappointing place for mariners to moor, outside of the city proper, amongst new office blocks and ruined warehouses. I took a train to Cobh to see the faded glory of a once-great sea-port, with the inevitable Titanic museum, then back to Cork. One night here was enough, although I did meet a nice Irish couple who also had a Vancouver 34, so the next night was at anchor in 5m up the secluded East Channel.



I had to get home, so left the boat at Crosshaven, arranging for new batteries to be delivered to replace the old ones, cases bulging, fizzing and hissing in an alarming manner.

A week later I was back, with my crew Pete, and a bumpy twenty-mile beat west to Glandore, where we walked to the famous (?) Dromberg Stone Circle, creatively situated by bronze-age man to offer fine sea views whilst aligning with the summer solstice.

Onwards west we sailed, only five miles, to Castlehaven where we picked up a buoy and rowed ashore for a pub dinner. This was the furthest west that we went, time being against us. From here we set off back to the Scilly Isles, 143M more or less south-east, with a useful SW-4 but swell from the NW making a confused sea. After four hours the skipper was sick, and the crew was "very quiet", so we turned NNE, enjoying a brilliant sail under blue skies into the sheltered fishing port of Courtnacsherry, where I was surprised to receive a text from John. Assuming that this was our lone wanderer John Apps, MCC, in *Raven*, I sent him a text, which he was surprised to receive as the first message was from our good friend (the late) John Neesom. Anyway, John (Apps) just happened to be only ten miles away enjoying a little jaunt to Madeira, so he called in and we all had dinner together.

And so on the following sunny morning with a SW4-5 breeze we sailed 85 miles towards the Scilly Isles, the wind failing after dusk so we motored through the night entering New



Grimsby Sound (between Tresco and Bryher) as the sun was just melting the early mist. Motoring past the long line of yachts on visitors buoys, we dropped anchor at the head of the line, closest to Tresco beach (and free !). The islands and the weather were as perfect as on our earlier visit a month before, so for a couple of

days we lazed around like regular tourists - swimming, eating, and doing very little.

And so, on the 19th June, we left St Mary's at 07.30 on the 40M crossing to Penzance, motor-sailing in a very slight ENE breeze, and in the settled weather anchored under the cliffs in Mullion Cove, on the east side of St Michael's Bay, eating dinner in the cockpit. The next morning the fine conditions continued, and we went around to Falmouth, via an inspection up the Helford river, now crammed with moorings. Falmouth was busy in a pleasant nautical way, my crew caught the train to London, and I went up the river to anchor in peace under Trevisick House.

My route then was to Plymouth, running at 6kn in a fine WNW-4 under main and cruising-chute. Then the chute wouldn't come down, as the halyard had jumped off the masthead block, so I was at least able to use the snuffer to tame the chute before climbing to release the halyard. Thank God for the mast-steps ! There followed a reasonable night at anchor in Cawsand Bay, where Nelson's fleet would ride-out westerly storms. Torbay was the next target, and I had a gentle run past the angry cliffs of Bolt Tail, Salcombe and Start Point, before the breeze shot up to SW 6-7 showing every sign of becoming a gale, so I made for Dartmouth on a very fast broad reach with all three sails (ie genoa, jib, and main) pulling well.

I enjoyed a night on the Town Quay and a beer in the Cherub. Then eastwards across Lyme Bay; it's 40M to Portland Bill, then a further ten or twenty to somewhere for the night. The passage around the Bill close inshore saves many miles, but timing has to be spot-on, and after 7 hours of sailing it's hard to guarantee an ETA, so I aimed well offshore, six miles south, and although sailing well at 7kn seemed to almost stop for two hours against the ebb, worse here than I had expected. Visibility was poor, hiding the Bill, and I looked forward to a night in Weymouth, fifteen miles away, but then the tide changed and rushed the other way – east – and took me with it at 10kn while the fog cleared and a beautiful evening developed. I took advantage, and had a vary fast run across the bay, close inshore past Lulworth Cove, St Alban's Head, and past the cliffs of Purbeck marble near Anvil Point, to anchor at sunset in Studland Bay.

My cruise was then in familiar waters, passing through the Solent, spending a few days in Chichester Harbour anchoring here and there, then via the Looe Channel, Sovereign Harbour, and Ramsgate.

So now I look back on a great cruise, visiting Ireland and The Scilly Isles, mainly in fine weather, and in a boat that on the whole had looked after me well.