

## SOLO TO THE SCILLIES (Part 1)

Bad weather had previously prevented me from getting to the Isles of Scilly, but in 2017 the omens looked good, and so in mid-April I left the Medway with one crew in my Vancouver 34 "Picaro" bound for Portsmouth, mainly motoring into a gentle westerly as far as Shoreham, then had a good sail in a NW-4 via the Looe Channel to pick-up a mooring in Portsmouth Harbour.

The boat now being thirteen years old I had renewed the standing rigging to keep the insurers happy, even though Vancouvers are substantially over-rigged in order to meet their Class A ocean-going category.

Bembridge Harbour, at the extreme east end of the island and away from the hurly-burly of Cowes, is a quiet haven, but has a long pontoon where visitors can lay afloat while the rest of the harbour almost dries. The entrance is well buoyed and the channel must be followed, but as there's a tide-gauge on the channel approach there's no real hazard. We spent a few nights here visiting family on the island. The harbour staff run a ferry service across to the village (ie pub) side, but it's a long walk back if the ferry's not working.

Then westwards with the ebb out of the Solent past Hurst Castle in a decent northerly to anchor for a bumpy night in Studland Bay, usually very sheltered but not with the wind in



the north. We were glad to leave, at the civilized time of 09.30, the next day, but with another nice N-4 breeze we had a good reach to Weymouth, passing well-offshore from the cliffs of the Jurassic coast to avoid the active army firing range. If one is stuck anywhere by bad weather, Weymouth

would be the place to be – an interesting and historic port, and a short bus ride to Portland Bill with good walks around the old quarries, and always the chance to watch yachts nipping through the inshore route past the Bill itself while the Race threatens a bit further out.

As a rule I do my planning for the following day in the evening and before I have my usual G&T, then errors are less frequent, although I admit are not unknown. This is important when round the Bill. My calcs showed that we should leave at about 07.00, so we left more or less on time to reach the Bill proper two hours later intending to go around close to the rocks, but for reasons not recorded in the log we went well south of the Race and then passed an hour standing still against the flood until the tide slackened its grip and we motor-sailed in a gentle but contrary W/SW-2 all the way (40 miles) to arrive Dartmouth at 16.30, spending two nights on the Town Quay.

So, a fortnight after leaving the Medway we had a brilliant sail in an E-4 onwards to the Yealm, a little sheltered nook just E of Plymouth, thence to Plymouth motoring hard against

strong wind and rain into Sutton Harbour, Plymouth. Crew Peter took the train home, and I took a walk around (part of) the harbour for lunch at the Royal Western YC, home of the Fastnet Race, and a place where I was totally ignored by all members so I can't recommend it. Once the gales had calmed I found a quiet anchorage up the R Lynner, under Ince Castle.



Now early May and with few boats around, I had a gentle broad-reach in an E-2 to the Fal for the night, anchoring close to Trelisick House. Gales were forecast, so I stayed on the Fal, motoring up to Malpass then a gentle sail back under the warm sun to anchor for the night out in the channel on a broad bend in the river; not a sound around but the hoot of owls. It's worth mentioning that the Vancouver is cutter-rigged, so can fly a small jib from the inner forestay when there's too much wind for the genoa, but I also have a cruising chute that, with a breeze from anywhere astern, is a powerful – and colourful – sail; from F2 to F4 it's a peach, F5 is fast and exciting, and F6 is madness.

Now this cruise had southern Ireland in its sights, but the Isles of Scilly were near and the forecast was fine, so between gales I sped around to the fishing port of Newlyn and hid there for two nights, finding only a single place and that being a bit close to the exposed harbour mouth, so I moored tightly between two small yachts using every warp that I had, with lines ashore as well as to the adjacent boats; after the first stormy night I check the lines on the neighbouring yacht to find one chaffed right through and one almost gone. Newlyn is not, I would say, a pretty place – it is a busy working fishing port – but it has its charms in cheap fish and friendly pubs. There were only three yachts amongst perhaps 150 fishing boats. Penzance is a nearby, and here I found the launderette, rather hidden within an amusement arcade.

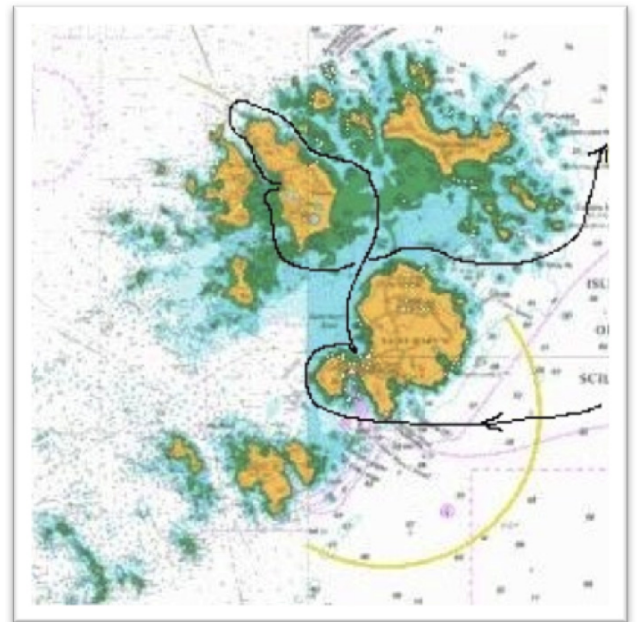
Newlyn is the closest port on the mainland to Scilly, forty miles into the Atlantic. I slipped out just after 08.00 in a N-3 and blue skies, but the breeze dropped so finished up motoring into the anchorage at Hugh Town, on the main island of St Mary's, picking up a visitors buoy at 14.15, averaging 6.5kn. Here the buoys are big and strong, designed to accept rafting of three boats in the busy season, and with the largest buoys for the bigger boats being the furthest from the shore. Fuel and water are available, from the harbour mole, but not while the island's supply ship "Scillonian III" is manoeuvring. The sea here is clear, and the bottom is generally sand; the sky is blue (well, it was on my visit) and the beer is good. I wouldn't say that things are cheap, all being double-handled from the mainland, but the place is a paradise in fine weather, and the atmosphere is relaxed and slow.



I stayed two nights at this island, walking and taking it easy, then I crossed to Tresco, maybe two miles off St Mary's, anchoring near their "harbour" – really just a short mole – and taking the dinghy ashore. Inter-island passages need care as some routes are only possible at HW; indeed at LWS it is possible to walk between some of the islands. Tresco is famous for its sub-tropical gardens, created over decades by the Dorrien-Smith family on the eastern side of the island sheltered from the Atlantic winds. Motor-boats ferry visitors out from St Mary's, although one can rent cottages on Tresco where there's a decent shop and a pub. I had coffee in the gardens café, the wild but fearless birds eating my cake from my plate.

Back on a mooring at St Mary's, I met a couple on their lovely wooden ex-racer "Polar Bear", we all had dinner on the terrace of a pub overlooking the harbour.

This fine weather couldn't last, and here in Scilly there's no marina and the anchorages are all open, so it was time to press on to Ireland. But, it's 135 miles to the Irish coast, and that's too far for me without a crew, so I attacked it in small stages, via St Ives Bay, Padstowe, Milford Haven, and then across to Kilmore Quay at the SE corner of Eire. Crossing the shipping lanes in the Irish Sea with no traffic, but twenty miles from land and a in 50m there was a crab-pot marker ..... One cannot relax.



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