



Cruising

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Thank you to volunteers

The CA's President, **Derek Lumb**, enjoyed thanking the CA's volunteers at the recent Flag Officers' lunch – and is grateful that more members are now starting to step forward to help us out. Could you be next?

My December report looked back on 2022 but now, in March, spring is well and truly with us and most of us are looking forward to the 2023 sailing season. For once it looks as if change has at least slowed down, for the moment.

We had expected (dreaded!) the EES (Entry/Exit System) for the Schengen area to be introduced this summer, but it has just been reported that its introduction has been delayed until the end of 2023. For *sailing* into the EU it may not have made that much difference. However, travelling by ferry to get to your boat could have been a nightmare, as all passengers in cars would have had to undergo a biometric check. If you are wondering how that would work – so are the ferry operators!

News on the VAT front, for owners who have EU-VAT paid boats which have never been in the UK, is less good. HMRC has told us and the other stakeholders that the Minister has decided not to make any concessions, and VAT will be payable if you bring your boat to the UK. The decision is particularly disappointing given that the problem was made worse by HMRC itself. In April 2020 it told the sailing community that such yachts could be returned after Brexit VAT-free, but changed its advice at the end of September 2020, by which time Covid and the imminent onset of winter made it virtually impossible to get your boat to the UK legally before the 31 December. To add a further twist to the logic of the situation, it appears that if you had moved your boat to Norway (or anywhere else outside the EU) you would not be required to pay VAT if you subsequently brought it to the UK.

RATS has put a huge amount of time and effort into lobbying for a concession, with fortnightly sub group meetings at 08:30 am on a Tuesday for most of the last two years. That group has liaised with other stakeholders and letters have been sent to HMRC, MPs, ministers and other influential people. There have been

meetings with HMRC, and Freedom of Information requests made. The current state of play is that RATS is pursuing HMRC for information regarding the reasoning behind the decision, but has little hope of a change of heart.

On the CA front, we held the Flag Officers' lunch in January. This was the first time since 2020 that we were able to hold it at its usual time. The lunch is the CA's opportunity to say thank you to the many volunteers who have worked so hard on behalf of all of us over the past year. This year we had a close to capacity attendance to see our awards presented by Mike Golding OBE, an honorary member of the CA, and thanks to Mike for his role.

It appears that if you had moved your boat to Norway, you would not now have to pay VAT to bring it to the UK

Throughout 2022 I have been highlighting the need for volunteers, and so it is with some relief that I am able to report that the situation has significantly improved, for example:

- Julian Dussek has taken over European Inland Waterways
- Fiona Slay and Malcolm Denham, Wessex
- Sue Gibson and Andy Johns, Solent
- Sarah Stevens as joint secretary for the Mediterranean
- Alan Kohler joint secretary for Celtic
- Caroline Milmo has moved from chair of the Crewing Service group to chair of the HLR group
- Malcolm Davidson has taken over as chair of the Crewing Service group.

We have a new Honorary Treasurer in Nick Clayton, now co-opted onto Council to replace Richard Sherwood who has been looking to retire on health grounds.



Richard had held the Treasurer role since 2010 and was the longest serving Council member. Under his stewardship the CA's finances have improved out of all recognition and he has worked tirelessly for the CA – spending several full days a month at CA House. He will be sorely missed from Council, both as a colleague and friend.

The Honorary Solicitor's role is one which is not called on that often, but when it is, it is incredibly valuable, and I am delighted to welcome Jenny Bowes as our new Honorary Solicitor.

So it's good news on the volunteer front, but there is more to do. Essex and the South West are still without secretaries and we have a potential vacancy in Biscay section. In other sections help is always welcome. Joining a team is much easier than taking over, and so if you would like to help out in parts of the CA that have been of service to you, then please have a word with the chair or secretary – any help, however little, is always welcome and becoming more involved will enhance your experience of the CA.

On that note can I wish all of you a successful and enjoyable sailing season in 2023.



Richard Sherwood, left, is thanked by Derek at the Flag Officers' lunch for his major contribution to the CA's current success

Right, Chair of Council Bob Garrett and General Manager Lucy Hyslop accept the award

CAptain's Mate app wins top award

CAptain's Mate has won the "Equipment Innovation of the Year" category at the prestigious British Yachting Awards.

Held back in November at the Royal Thames Yacht Club, London, the British Yachting Awards rewarded the very best examples of excellence and celebrate the leading marine products, services, yachts, destinations and achievements across 11 cruising and racing categories.

CAptain's Mate was voted as the winner from seven nominees in the equipment category, with the nominees shortlisted by *Sailing Today with Yachts & Yachting* and voted for by their worldwide readership and the public (and CA members – thank you!).

Rob Peake, Group Editor of *Sailing Today with Yachts & Yachting*, said, "The winners in the British Yachting Awards are decided by public vote and it is no surprise that sailors showed their support

for an app that offers such a huge amount of up-to-date cruising advice. CAptain's Mate is a great app on many levels, but at its core it creates a better informed, safer cruising community. Congratulations to the Cruising Association's team."

Receiving the British Yachting Award, handmade by historic chandler Davey & Co, Bob Garrett, Chair of the CA Council commented, "The Cruising Association's objective is to share knowledge for members within the Association and also to the broader cruising community. CAptain's Mate has massively boosted their cruising experience and discovery of new cruising waters. I accept this Award on behalf of all our members. We are proud of what has been achieved and what is still to come.

"It was wonderful to see finalists from across the sailing and cruising industry



coming together, and to share how we are all playing a key part in evolving better products and services across the sector."

Garmin Navionics+ cartography came second in the equipment category. Other BYA winners included Buckler's Hard Yacht Harbour, which won Marina of the Year; the Tall Ships Youth Trust, which won Charity of the Year; and Ellie Driver, at 20 the youngest person to do the Round Britain & Ireland Race, with her father Jim, who won Pantaenius Sailor of the Year.

Remember to register your EPIRB or PLB

CA members with UK-registered boats are reminded that details of emergency beacons, including EPIRBs and PLBs, should be registered with the new MCA online beacon registry: www.gov.uk/register-406-beacons. If you had a beacon registered on the previous offline system, you may have received a reminder letter from the MCA. You can claim your existing beacon registry entry by creating an account using the same email as you used to register your beacon with the previous system. Any records on the previous system will remain visible for about 18 months but unclaimed beacons will start to be deleted from about October 2024. In the future the MCA will be asking users to validate their details on the new system at regular intervals.



Goodbye to old version of app

If you still have a pre-2021 copy of CAptain's Mate on your mobile, it's time to upgrade, because we turned off the old app's ability to obtain data in mid-February. You're missing out on nearly two years' worth of reports by your fellow members, plus the hard work of editors and improvements in the new software.

The vast majority of CAptain's Mate users now have the new version (4.x.x, with orange map pins), but a few of you were still connecting with version 2 (which has red pins – see image above right). This was kept alive, accessing archive data, since the launch of the new app in March 2021, to smooth the transition for members with legacy phones and tablets, or those who weren't in a position to make the upgrade immediately. However, it can no longer be supported on the CA's digital infrastructure, and the information it contained was becoming increasingly stale. Nearly two years down the line, it's time to say goodbye to the old CAptain's Mate.

You can find the latest version of CAptain's Mate on the **Google Play Store** or **Apple App Store**. Anyone who has problems installing it on an ageing device should try the web version at theca.org.uk/ciapp, which also allows you to enter reports on a full-size keyboard.



Time and tide... don't get them muddled up

On 21 July 1992, my wife and I, with 10-year-old son as crew, were cruising along the coast of north Brittany in our Westerly Konsort, *Quintessence*. We sailed from Dahouët, about 25 miles west of St Malo, to Saint-Quay-Portrieux (SQP) about the same distance further east. It was a lovely summer day and we had a blissful sail across the Baie de Saint Brieuc. The wind was on the beam, the sun was shining, the navigation seemed straightforward.

SQP is guarded by an archipelago of rocks both visible and below the surface, but the channel is about a mile wide and buoyed; so what could go wrong? We passed the south cardinal and it was a straight run in. We could see the harbour mouth straight ahead.

Suddenly there was a loud bang and *Quintessence* jolted. Moment of horror! Our son erupted through the hatch, clutching his lifejacket. Then I noticed that the south cardinal which should have been on our starboard quarter was now on our port quarter. We were right in amongst the rocks.

We immediately turned through 180 degrees and sailed out into clear water, while my son checked the bilges for incoming



"That's the tricky bit done, it's a clear run in now..."

water. There was none. In a minute we were out in the channel, heading for the harbour and keeping the line between buoy and harbour mouth well to starboard. We anchored near the entrance of SQP's tidal harbour to dry out and check for damage. Fortunately the only sign of collision was scratched antifoul on one keel. A lucky escape!

So what went wrong? It was clear that there was a strong current pushing us north-east of which I was unaware. I went back to the almanac and worked out the tides again. The standard port for SQP was St Helier, with data in GMT. The data for SQP was in French standard time. Boat time was French summer time. I realised that I had got muddled up in converting times and expected the tide to turn an hour after it did. This was compounded by poor watch-keeping. I should have noticed the back-bearing of the south cardinal behind me was changing. Well, I was lucky, and I learnt a number of valuable lessons.

John Harwood



We'd really appreciate your blunders

Has John's story inspired you to recall your most embarrassing moment on board? Please do tell us about the silliest mistake you have ever made on a boat... or maybe the silliest you're willing to admit to. The best will be published in each issue of *Cruising*, alongside a cartoon by wonderful marine illustrator Claudia Myatt. The original artwork will be the prize for the winner each quarter. Send your entries to editor@theca.org.uk before 1 May for the June issue, with the subject line "Boating blunders". They should be around 300 words.

CREW: "I was brought up with the sea at the bottom of our garden in the NW of England. I learned to sail as soon as I could walk and have been 'messaging about in boats' ever since. Bringing up my family and earning a living caused a slight diversion for a few decades! So, I am now trying to regain some time for sailing... I have the RYA ICC, VHF, CEVNI, plus PADI Advanced Diver and Sea Survival. My main aim in 2023 is to do one-day or short UK trips to meet like-minded people who need crew capable of acting as skipper. I am happy to travel a reasonable distance to base, or even abroad."

Join the Crewing Service

The CA's Crewing Service puts skippers in touch with crew and crew in touch with skippers. If you're planning for this summer, why not contact potential crew members now?



We hold crewing meetings at CA House during winter on the first Thursday of each month and also via Zoom. There's just a taste of what's on offer in our crew and skipper listings in the quotes here. Find out more at www.theca.org.uk/crewing/welcome and if you have any queries please contact Malcolm Davidson at crewing@theca.org.uk

SKIPPER: "From North Caribbean (departure location flexible) to Azores via possible stop in Bermuda. Two weeks in Azores then to A Coruña, Spain. Overall 6-8 weeks on board leaving end April 2023. Active husband and wife owners need experienced crew to help sail back to Europe after season in Caribbean. Ideally require extensive offshore and transatlantic experience."

A long journey to the CA

Malcolm Davidson has recently taken on the role of running the CA's Crewing Service



My life in sailing began when my parents bought an old wooden Enterprise dinghy. Bringing it back to life meant spending that winter in the cold garage at home rubbing down, painting and varnishing the boat until it shone.

We joined the Frensham Pond Sailing Club in south-west Surrey and for much of my teenage years I spent weekends racing the Enterprise and crewing for a family friend.

The demands of studying and then work as a young journalist put paid to regular sailing, but my love for the water, both on it and as a scuba diver, remained strong. Even today I live beside the Thames, not far from CA House, and watch the daily movement of the tides and traffic on the river.

The journey from dinghy sailor to joining the CA and chairing the Crewing Service has been a long one.

Much of my professional life has been spent with Reuters, the international news agency, which has taken me to many parts of the world as a correspondent with postings in Brussels, India, the Philippines, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Before that my parents lived for a while in the United States and I and my now wife, Gill, spent a couple of years in Sydney.

There was not much time for sailing while working abroad, but family holidays in places like the Maldives and Thailand gave us the chance to sail the odd Hobie Cat and our opportunities for water sports grew hugely with the move to Manila.

After more than 10 years abroad we decided to come back to London, and I eventually turned my thoughts to the idea of big boat sailing. With some colleagues, I helped create the Reuters Sailing Club, running evening dinghy sailing near the Canary Wharf office, weekend charters in the Solent and organising trips to the Channel Islands and France.

It wasn't until after I retired that I learned about the CA and the Crewing Service when I got chatting to Caroline Milmo at our local gym.

With Reuters, I had postings in Brussels, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Philippines, and we lived in Sydney for a couple of years

And it has proved a great way to sail with different skippers, different boats and to discover new areas. I've sailed with Trevor Pratt in Croatia, the Ionian and Malta, with Andy Miller around Sicily and with others in Greece, Turkey and in British waters too.

Not everything went completely well, of course. There was one occasion when I went out with friends for a cruise through the Stockholm Archipelago. As their wooden yacht was being towed out of its winter shed, the yard foolishly put one of the lifting pads over an anode and promptly pushed it through the bottom. That delayed things for a few days.

So why haven't I bought a boat? Well, Gill doesn't like sailing, at least not for extended periods, and I want to be free to try new areas and different boats without the tie of always having to go to the same place.

I think that is one of the beauties of the Crewing Service. It offers people new to sailing the opportunity to hone their skills as well as sail new waters. And for skippers thinking of changing boat, it gives them the chance to try out prospective yachts before they buy.

This year we have lots of skippers offering a big range of trips -- from midweek sailing in the Solent, right up to Nick Hine's preparatory trip before a three-year circumnavigation (see page 52 for more details) and Steve Bradley's plan to sail from Scotland to Svalbard via the Norwegian coast.

One of the innovations the Crewing Service introduced during Covid was Zoom meetings that have brought in members living beyond easy reach of Limehouse. I started helping Caroline with those Zoom sessions and last autumn she persuaded me to take over the Crewing Service as she wanted to move on to organising the HLRs.

And I'm glad she did. The Crewing Service and the CA have given me a lot of pleasure over the last few years, and I am very keen to see it develop its mission to bring crew and skippers together to everybody's advantage.



La Ciotat



Paul Weston visits a town in Provence with spacious anchorages, an old port, superyacht repairs and the world's oldest cinema

I think my favourite port is La Ciotat, on the coast of Provence between Marseilles and Toulon. We have visited several times in *Mitch*, our Mitchell 31 Sea Angler, and in *Mitch's* replacement, *Kadash*, a 42ft aluminium lift-keeler. The Bay of La Ciotat is spacious, about three miles across, surrounded by the green pine-clad hills of Provence stretching into the distance, entered from the west through the passage between Cap de l'Aigle and Ile Vert. At sunrise and sunset Cap de l'Aigle's stratified red cliffs seem almost to glow.

In our experience the bay is never so crowded that a good anchorage cannot be found, but it is open to the south. The north west corner is protected from the Mistral, and in easterlies La Madrague is sheltered. The chart shows a seaplane

landing area in the middle of the bay, and this should be taken seriously – on one occasion a Canadair firefighting aircraft diving to scoop up water passed frighteningly close to our masthead.

We have spent many pleasant days at anchor off La Ciotat, though we probably prefer La Madrague, tucking our shallow draft boats close into the shore. Be careful to drop your anchor on a patch of sand, as anchoring on sea grass is environmentally damaging and can lead to dragging. There is a holiday camp at La Madrague, with a small supermarket, and some very pleasant walks through pine woods, including one which circles a historic vineyard.

The port of La Ciotat, easily identified from miles away by huge shipyard cranes, has visitor moorings in the marina and in the Old Port. We have not been into the marina, but the Old Port is delightfully picturesque, a stone basin surrounded by pastel coloured buildings. Yachts are moored stern to, but large bollards betray its former life as a commercial port. La Ciotat, "The Harbour" in Provençal, exported stone and imported material for the shipbuilding yard as evidenced by a crane in the north west corner which was used to lift steel plates from ships onto railway wagons for the short trip to the yard.

Shipbuilding ceased in the 1980s, but the yard is now a thriving superyacht repair facility, where vast yachts are hauled

out or dry-docked for maintenance. The existing lifting platform, capable of handling superyachts weighing up to 2,000 tons, has recently been supplemented by one for megayachts with 4,300-ton capacity, and the Krupp gantry crane can handle odd-shaped craft up to 600 tons displacement.

Our first trip to La Ciotat was in the summer of 2021 when we anchored *Mitch* just off the beach and took the dinghy ashore. Just across the road from the marina's slipway is l'Eden-Théâtre, said to be the oldest cinema in the world. La Ciotat was the summer home of the Lumière brothers, inventors of the motion picture, and their film *l'Arrivée d'un train*



The world's oldest cinema

Do you have a favourite harbour, anywhere in the world? If you can write 500-1500 words about it and have some photos, please contact editor@theca.org.uk



Left, Mitch at anchor off La Ciotat and Kadash in the Vieux Port. Right, an unmanned submersible from iXblue under test; superyachts under repair are visible behind



en gare de La Ciotat is one of the earliest movies. La Ciotat is also famous for another invention, *pétanque*, the form of boules commonly played in France and abroad, codified in La Ciotat in 1902.

We had lunch on the tree-shaded terrace of the Bistrot Ciéutat, next to the church, which has a fine view of the harbour.

There is a huge choice of restaurants, many in the buildings surrounding the harbour, and in summer evenings the pedestrianised streets are crowded with tourists. There are several supermarkets near the harbour, and a larger Carrefour supermarket and Mr Bricolage DIY shop within walking or cycling distance.

We visited La Ciotat again in 2022, in our sailing boat *Kadash*, mooring alongside the wall at the entrance to the Old Harbour to wait out a mistral. As well as superyacht repair, the former shipyard is used by the iXblue company, which tests its DriX USV surface drones from a

base just behind *Kadash's* berth. It was quite startling to see these odd looking vessels, 7.7 metres long and reminiscent of orange submarines, setting out and berthing with nobody aboard. The drones are used for underwater survey work, and are stable platforms for sonar and other instruments, with a deep drop keel.

Kadash's berth, which was away from the official visitors' moorings, was not lacking in character. A temporary stadium had been erected a few yards away, and this was in use as a venue for a dancing school's end of year show, which involved extremely loud music, and even closer to the boat, there were often small gatherings of enthusiasts for illicit substances.

The Jardin Mugel, about a mile from the Old Harbour, is well worth a visit for its slightly wild ambience, and the climb to the Belvédère du Mugel viewpoint near the top of Cap de l'Aigle is fatiguing

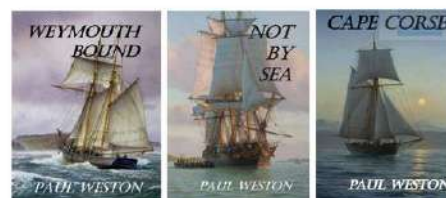
but rewarding. The walk along the harbour mole gives a good view of the superyachts in for refit. There are several small, sheltered beaches near Jardin Mugel, and larger sandy beaches on the east side of the town.


Rail connections to Marseilles and Nice airports are good, though the current station, not the one filmed by the *Lumières*, is a bus ride away. To the west, the limestone inlets of the Calanques National Park provide scenic anchorages, and once round Cap Sicie to the east, the huge harbour of Toulon and the Îles d'Hyères are an excellent cruising ground, though all of these places are crowded in peak season.

I would certainly recommend a visit to La Ciotat for anyone cruising the coast of Provence.



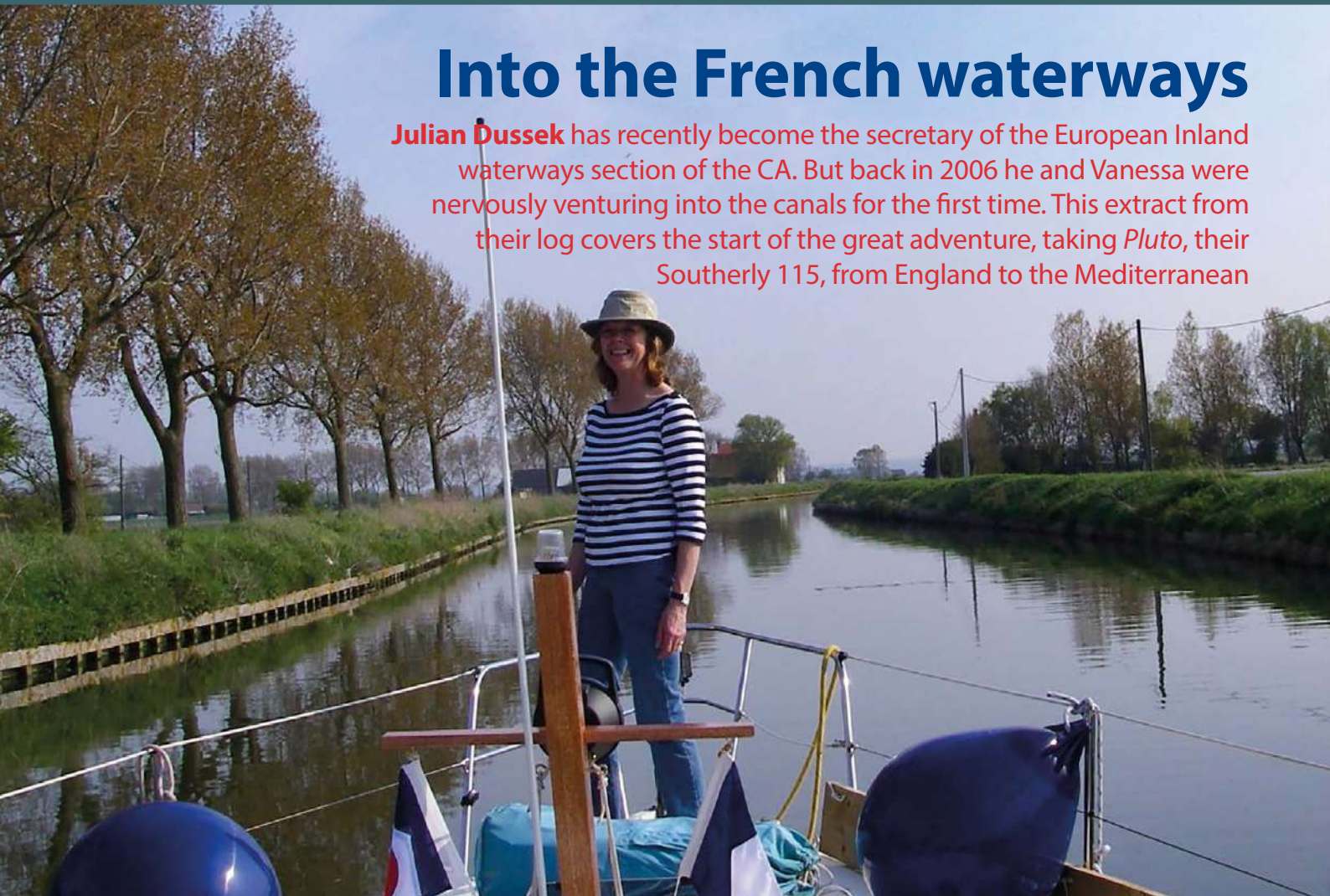
Historic vineyard at La Madrague



Paul Weston, www.paulwestonauthor.com, is the author of two naval historical fiction novels, *Weymouth Bound* and *Not by Sea*, with a third, *Cape Corse*, to be published soon. You can buy the books on Amazon . 

Into the French waterways

Julian Dussek has recently become the secretary of the European Inland waterways section of the CA. But back in 2006 he and Vanessa were nervously venturing into the canals for the first time. This extract from their log covers the start of the great adventure, taking *Pluto*, their Southerly 115, from England to the Mediterranean



Gravelines is probably one of the least common portals of entry to the French canal system¹ but appeared the most attractive. To East Coast sailors, especially coming from Conyer, a two-hour tidal window for entry did not seem daunting, nor was it. Ramsgate to Gravelines was a very pleasant seven-hour sail and the approach to the town was easy. The harbourmaster was charming and spoke excellent English. He knew from previous emails that we were coming. On entering the capitainerie there was a loud cry "Jules, you must be Jules and Vanessa, I am Alain."

Hugh McKnight in *Cruising French Waterways* says of Gravelines "the lock is available at certain times only" and refers the reader to the Carte Guide. The Navicarte says "lock open on demand", contact the harbour watcher the day before. This is not strictly true. The lock only opens at certain states of the tide; there are periods of three or four days when you *can* get in, then you wait another four days or so for the

next suitable times. But even this is a simplification. The gates are decrepit and only open for about five minutes when the water levels either side equilibrate. We were interviewed by charming people in different offices to make quite sure that we knew that at three o'clock exactly the gates should open. We must wait, engine running, 100m from the gates and on the sign from the keeper were to rush through. Five minutes was the total allowable time, and, oh, there was another vessel coming the other way. There was great excitement, it was the first use of the year and VNF (Voies Navigables de France) were still repairing

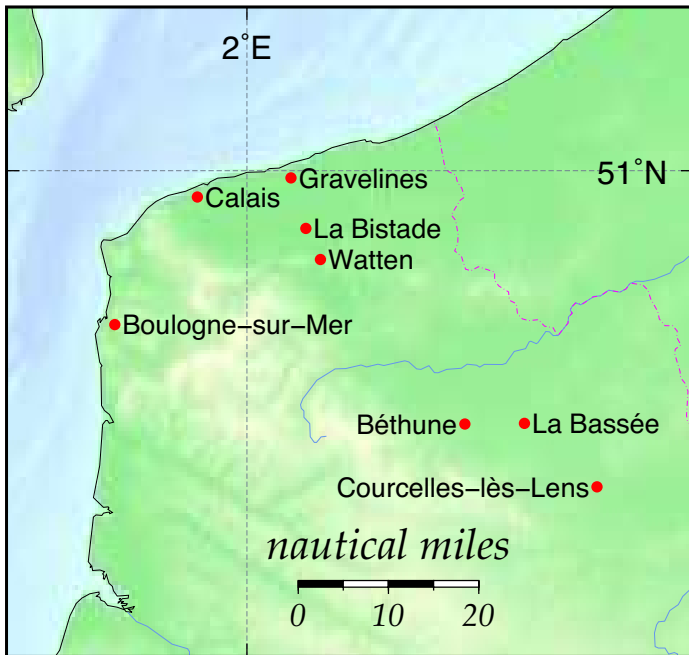
the gates the day before.

Wednesday 3 May The day for going through the lock. We were ready, moored to a boat near the lock entrance awaiting instructions. At three o'clock it was obvious that there was still a three foot discrepancy in the levels, but there were five VNF officials busy with ropes, poles, winches and chains. Slowly the level rose and we were beckoned forward. Where was this five-minute rush? We were invited to lie gently in the lock entrance for ten minutes, the gates opened and without fuss we slid in. Apparently there was a slight delay with the first lifting bridge so we were asked to delay our



VNF officials waiting to open the lock

¹ The gates have not been restored, so it is no longer possible to enter the canal system at Gravelines.



Opposite, the River Aa. In Narrow Dog to Carcassonne the author, Terry Darlington, says that every Frenchman loves an Englishwoman in a hat. Above, La Bistade

start which gave us time for tea and then we were off. Where were the rush, the anticipated problems? And there wasn't a boat coming the other way.

Thence we went up the River Aa to La Bistade (K17) to drink with Brigitte in her bar. La Bistade is in the centre for cockfighting in Northern France where it is legal². Sadly all the cockerels are shut indoors because of bird flu. Brigitte told us that since they were only bred for fighting, they die if they are shut up too long without a fight. They are hoping that the ban will be lifted in June and the *gallodrome* behind the bar will become alive again. We noticed that boxes of eggs were being passed over the counter – certainly not for eating.

And so to bed, well satisfied that at last we had achieved our goal, moored outside La Bistade on the way down the canals to the Mediterranean. We have spent years planning this trip. Two years ago we were at La Bistade with the car saying "one day we will bring our boat here". It has come true. The last two years of planning, buying the boat, equipping the boat and learning to sail it have been exciting, but the last few weeks of fitting out, last-minute hitches, organising mowing and house-sitting together with the excitement of actually realizing the dream, has left us more exhausted than we could have imagined. We decided that a day of rest before attempting the big locks with the big-boy barges was what was needed.

Thursday 4 May We had a *café* with Brigitte before our departure and were

surprised with real Northern *gentillesse* as she gave us a jar of her homemade hare paté, "for the boat" she said. We tried it for lunch and it was rich and delicious.

The River Aa is tranquil, with miles of green river banks. This was just what we needed. The banks are lined with pollarded and limbless trees, farms, cows, mad cyclists in shiny tight fitting shorts on the tow path and friendly waves from the locals. The warm muddy smell of the river, mingled with grazing cow, was intoxicating.

Apart from the smell of sewage, the dog muck, two road bridges and a railway line, this was an excellent stop

Friday, 5 May The forecast was for the weather to deteriorate, so we left Watten at eight. The locks are huge and accommodated us, a Dutch motor cruiser, a barge carrying sand and a huge double barge nearly 80m long. Though intimidating, there were no problems and we then motored to Béthune, mooring up in an old canal at K72.5 which had once been a coal depot but was now used for barges awaiting commissions and for pleasure boats. We walked half an hour into Béthune, which is very smart, with several first-class butchers and delicatessens. The bar near where we had moored was a good rough bar. The barmaid/proprietress was heavily made up, was probably 40 and looked 70 and appeared totally drunk. She kept disappearing to a back room, only appearing when someone rang a bell,

straight out of a film set.

We're still sorting things out, trying to get the bimini into the least obstructive position, setting up the mast lights, sorting out fenders. There is always something to do.

Saturday 6 May A short trip was scheduled, but it involved going through an automatic lock. We had not met one before and it filled the skipper with anxiety as there is no one there actually to work the lock, but in fact the guide was wrong. There was a lock-keeper who spoke on the VHF and controlled things from his high ivory tower, as well as wanting to see our documents to show that we had paid for the annual permit. These are huge locks designed for two 38.5-metre barges.

We went then down a detour (K61) to the town of La Bassée where there was a public pontoon. Apart from the smell of sewage, the dog muck all along the towpath, two road bridges and a railway line, this was an excellent stop. The skipper did what he was aiming to get away from, Saturday morning shopping in a supermarket, but all was well as we were able, using our sack trolley, to stock up on wine and beer. The town itself is delightful and prosperous, and a really useful place to stock up for the forthcoming section.

We set off for Courcelles-les-Lens. The autopilot had all along been misbehaving. Every time we went under a bridge it would attempt to charge the bank. It also disliked approaching barges and would attempt to attack them, but today it exceeded itself and refused to disengage, which meant an urgent

² Still permitted in 2023, in around 50 communes in Nord and Pas-de-Calais



Above, our first real lock, at Watten.

Right, Ascenseur à bateaux des Fontinettes at Arques. It was built in 1888, inspired by the Anderton Boat Lift, to replace five locks, and could lift vessels up to 300 tonnes displacement. It worked until 1967 and is now under restoration by a local conservation group.

Below right, Béthune

stop to detach it and put it into solitary confinement. (This involved the mate having to leap ashore and plant two rond anchors in the grassy bank and haul in the boat). The autopilot won't be allowed to perform again for this part of the journey unless it is reformed. Its misbehaviour was particularly well timed: we were at a bifurcation of the canals and had of course taken the wrong limb initially. It was while we were correcting the error that the autopilot had decided to give up. We were further thrown into confusion by someone in an official-looking van shouting to tell us that we were going in the wrong direction, which we found we weren't. Altogether this was a thoroughly harassing moment.

We eventually stopped in a tiny marina on minuscule pontoons at Courcelles (K35.5). Free mooring, free electricity and water made up for a lack of any other facilities, or at least those that you would use. The lavatory was a hole in the ground and the light bulb had gone. We did not dare use the filthy shower which upset them, as they were very proud of it, and had opened it specially for us.

This area of France is very heavily industrial. There are lots of defunct coal mines and grassed over slag heaps. It is not a pretty area. The only colour in this grey, desolate industrial area, among the disused factories was under the bridges where there was the most amazing amount of graffiti – sadly none of it legible.

Sunday 7 May It had rained heavily all night and the sky was uniformly grey. This was a day of rest anyway so we got up in a leisurely way and walked into Courcelles. What a dump; nowhere was open, not one bar, nothing. Being in a mining area with huge slag heaps around, it was like being in Wales 30 years ago on a wet Sunday. It took an hour to walk there and back but when we got back to our pontoon, in what is supposedly a leisure area, which of course is shut as the season has not yet started we found a bar, an amazing bar: it was in the front room of a dingy house.

The beautiful visitors' pontoon had a permanent resident who even had his car there. We, the visitor, had to squeeze into a tiny space

There were three tables; at one was granny, with a three-month-old baby being bottle fed, on milk one assumes, although the other bottles on the table were all beer. At another table was a plump woman of about 35 with more beer bottles, and at the third was the plump young mother with more beer bottles. A sullen lad came and went and we gather he was the baby's father. Granny looked 80 but was probably in her 50s. In front of the fireplace was a magnificent radiogram, pure 1960s. We

had some wine and merry conversation especially as one plump woman spoke a little English which she wanted to use. We left this time warp, more suitable for a Buñuel film, much cheered at finding that France is not totally modernised.

The day brightened up and we did boat work, preparing ourselves for the big locks to come, and the problem of how to extricate *Pluto* from a very tight space. A recurring problem is that the visitors' pontoons are occupied by long term residents. Here at Courcelles there was a beautiful pontoon for visitors but it had a permanent resident on it, so permanent he even had his car there. That is why we, the visitor, had to squeeze into a tiny space.

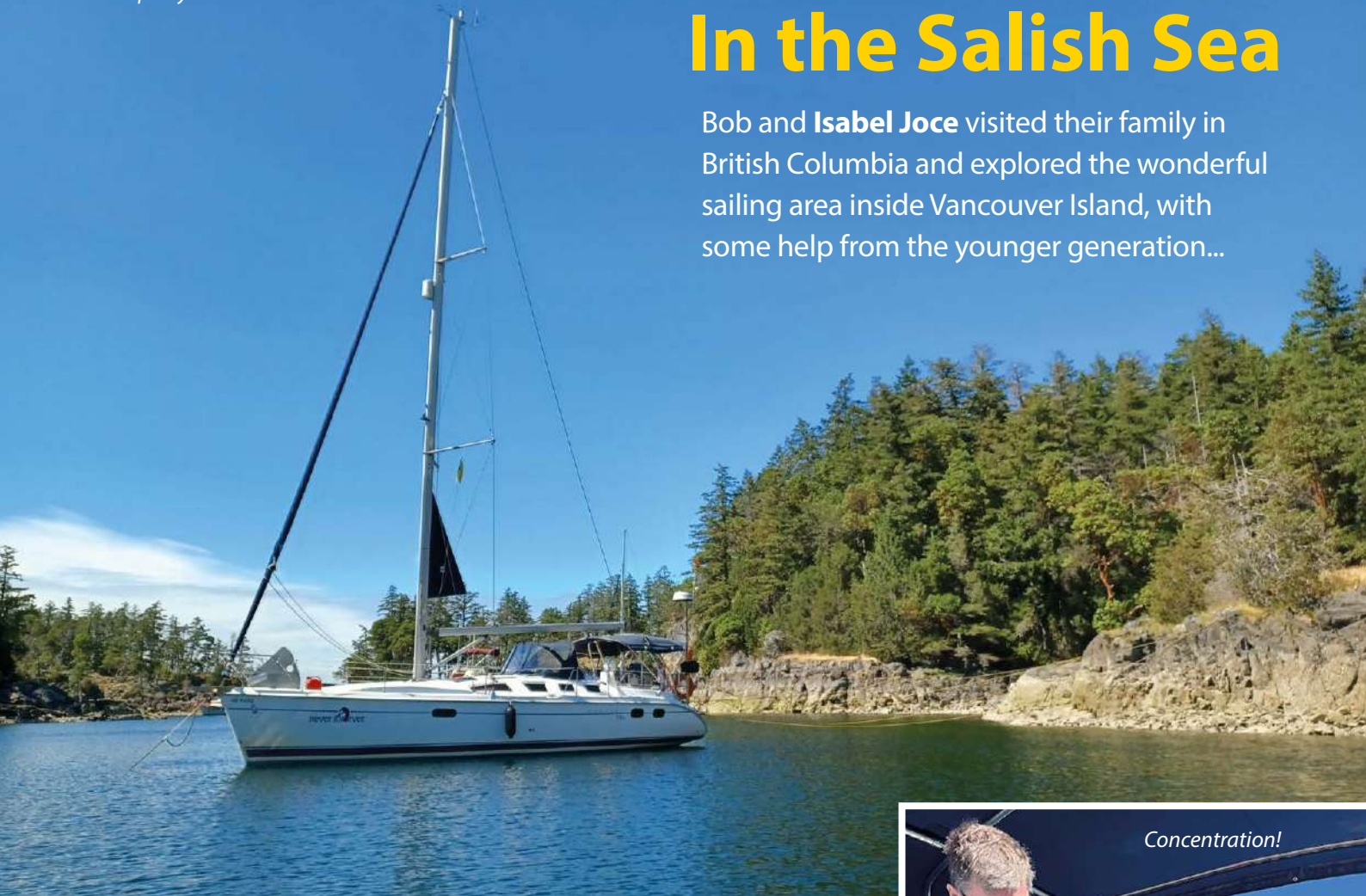
Monday 8 May We left in a light shower of rain and then it poured. It poured most of the day. We did four locks today and some of them were "after this one we'll have a cognac" locks. After a day of wind and rain we are both a jolly shade of Cahors red.

Jules & Vanessa Dussek sailed their Southerly 115 *Pluto* away from British waters in 2006 and have been writing about their adventures ever since. We plan to carry more articles in future issues of *Cruising*. Jules was president of the CA from 2018-21 and is a retired cardiothoracic surgeon.



In the Salish Sea

Bob and **Isabel Jace** visited their family in British Columbia and explored the wonderful sailing area inside Vancouver Island, with some help from the younger generation...



About eight years ago our son and daughter in law moved near to Whistler in British Columbia, Canada. Each time we drove up the impressive Sea to Sky Highway from Vancouver we had amazing views of the Salish Sea and wondered what it would be like to sail there. In summer 2022 we found out!

On Sunday 31 July we took a ferry from Horseshoe Bay on the mainland, to Departure Bay, Nanaimo on Vancouver Island and walked to the Nanaimo Yacht Charter base. Soon we were on-board our first week's boat – a 30ft Catalina (*Sommelier*). Because of Covid-19, our briefing had been online, but there were staff to help, and a courtesy car was available for us to do our provisioning.

The Salish Sea consists of the waters between mainland BC and Vancouver Island and southwards to the USA. For our first week we intended to stay in the area known as the Sunshine Coast.

Our first sailing day dawned hot and sunny. The first challenge was to leave Nanaimo harbour and get into the open sea. Firstly, we had to check that the nearby firing range was not active, and

then run the gauntlet of the local sea planes (float planes). The planes appeared to be buzzing us from overhead and then taking off and landing just metres away from us – it was very disconcerting. This became such a common occurrence that we soon got used to it! There was a terrific contrast in weather conditions once away from the harbour. The temperature dropped substantially, there was a fair swell, and the wind blew a steady 18-20kt. We wanted to head north: the wind was, naturally, northerly. Our small engine wasn't making much way against the wind, waves and tide, so the sails were quickly deployed and eventually progress was made. Once everything had calmed down, we had time to appreciate the beauty and the grandeur of the snow-capped peaks and tree-covered hills in the distance.

It was Canada Day, a bank holiday, and there were many boats out and about. On Channel 16 we heard frequent Maydays and Pan Pans – plenty of motor cruisers had engine breakdowns and there were requests for tows. It was quite reminiscent of the Solent!



Our first stop was about 20 miles away in Secret Bay, back on the mainland Sunshine Coast. The anchoring options in the main bay were not appealing so we crept carefully up the river and dropped our anchor. The tidal range was about 4m, so Bob double-checked his calculations to ensure we didn't run aground in the night! The sun came back out, and so did the canoeists and paddleboarders.

Tuesday 2 August We headed northwards towards Ballet Bay. The winds

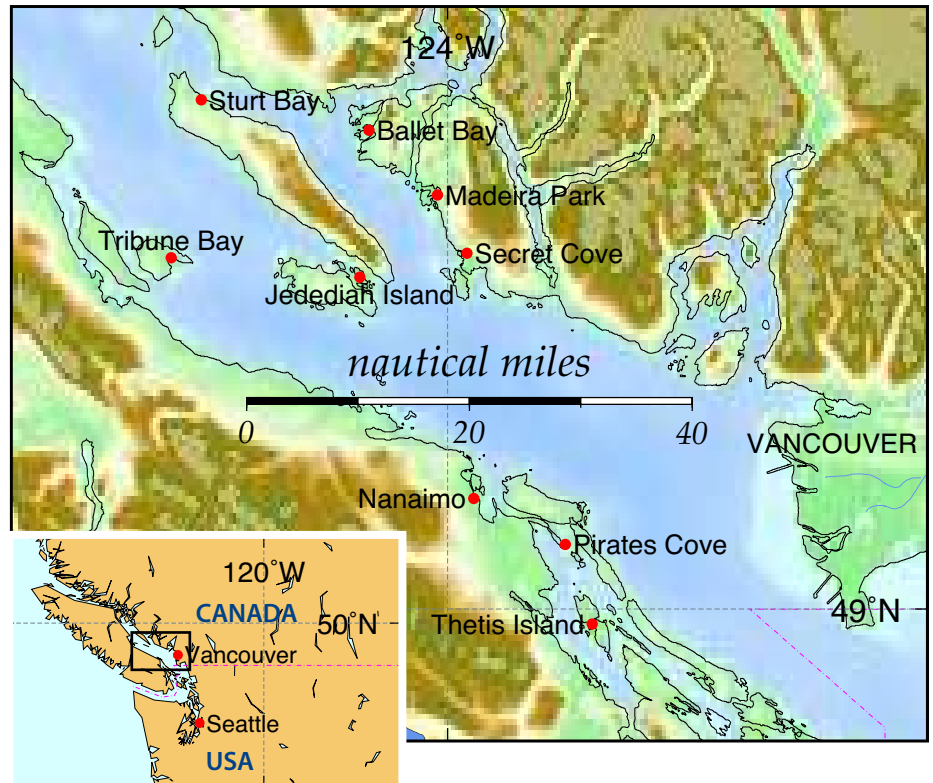


Sommelier, a 30ft Catalina, was the boat chartered for the first week. When the family arrived there was a swap to a newer and more spacious Hunter 38, Never for Ever (opposite). Bob & Isabel chose www.nanaimoyachtcharters.com as it is easy to sail from Nanaimo to both the Sunshine Coast and the Gulf Islands, there was a wide range of different yachts to choose from, the base was accessible by public transport and charters could start on any day

were still northerly, but we had a good sail with plenty of sunshine. We had our first view of a “log train” – a single tug with a very long tow rope pulling an enormous number of logs. You wouldn’t want to get anywhere near it!

We crept into Ballet Bay past sunbathing seals, checking for the rocks, and scouting for a good spot. The place was so beautiful – brilliant blue sky, trees lining the shore, distant mountains, and blue-green water. After tying back to a tree, we were content and had a great swim. As the entire shore is private, we could not have a walk, so we got the oars out and had a nice long row round tiny islands and almost had conversations with the visiting seals.

Wednesday 3 August was a grizzly day with rain and the wind now coming from the south. Leaving the “Sunshine” coast



we reached westwards across to Texada Island having an excellent sail despite the weather.

Coming into Sturt Bay it was obvious that the anchorage was not a good idea, so we went alongside at the Texada Boat Club’s visitor’s pontoon. Attractive it was not, being overlooked by a boatyard, but it was safe and secure. Several other yachts pulled in throughout the afternoon and the “dock” was full of cheerful chatter. Canadians, especially mariners, are immensely friendly and always want to know where in England you come from, why you were here, and where you have sailed from that day. The “wharfinger” came to take our fees and tell us where we could find a supermarket and somewhere to eat. Luckily, we set off in good time (past deer roaming on the road) – as bars and restaurants in British Columbia often shut early. We managed to get the last two servings of food in the

only eatery that was open.

Thursday 4 August The weather was greatly improved and the sun shone again. I was helming and suddenly saw a black shape in the distance, then a huge waterspout and realised it was a whale. I was ridiculously excited. That whale disappeared but, in the distance, we saw some more massive waterspouts. We couldn’t see the whales themselves but there was no doubt what it was.

The sail to Tribune Bay on the southeast coast of Hornby Island was lovely. We discovered a huge sandy beach – not a rock-strewn cove. It was absolutely packed, probably because Monday had been a bank holiday, but everyone was anchored very considerably. We were able to drop our anchor without the bother of tying back and enjoyed a fantastic sunset in a calm anchorage.

Friday 5 August Today we had planned to stay on Jedediah Island. This is a small National Park with many small bays to explore and anchor in. There are very few facilities, and it is very unspoiled. It seemed that we sailed round the whole island looking for a suitable spot to stay, but none could be found – the bays were full up with other boats or too deep, or perhaps we just weren’t brave enough. So, we cut our losses and sailed to Boho bay on Lasqueti Island. As with many anchorages in BC the depths were quite considerable (here 30m) so we anchored and took a line ashore – there was quite a steep climb for Bob to find a suitable tree! I wasn’t reassured when a

Tribune Bay





Adult crew enjoy the picnic area

neighbouring motorboat told us that a yacht had dragged in the same location on the previous night. But all was calm.

Saturday 6 August After all our anchoring we decided to try a marina. We sailed downwind for French Creek on Vancouver Island. This was a "municipal" marina so after phoning ahead, we were told that it wasn't too busy, to come in and find a spot, and try not to berth more than three boats out. We tentatively drove around the absolutely packed harbour desperately looking for a spot, and as usual in Canada, a friendly person on the dock indicated a suitable location – only one boat out! The marina shop was closed (as the owner had to attend a funeral) so we had to go to the pub for supper, the best halibut and chips we have ever eaten!

Sunday 7 August All too soon we were heading back to Nanaimo to change yachts and start another phase of our adventure. Today we saw yet more of the massive tugs towing barges with seemingly impossible numbers of containers piled high.

Dodd Narrows at slack water



Monday 8 August We had a new yacht! *Never for Ever* was a Hunter 38, larger and much more modern than *Sommelier*. We were soon "boarded" by our son and daughter-in-law and two lively young boys. After a short safety briefing, we went to Mark Bay – a nearby anchorage with mooring buoys (pronounced "booyes" in Canadian!) After a BBQ on board we turned in for an early night.

Tuesday 9 August We were now heading south to the Gulf Islands and the relatively calm Georgia Straits for some gentle sailing suitable for a young crew. The currents in the Georgia Straits are generally fairly moderate, but some of the narrow channels have very fast streams and even rapids and can only be transited around slack water. We had to be up early for a 7am trip through the infamous Dodd Narrows where the current can run at 7-10kt. Getting up was not a problem as at 6.30am Archie (five) and Riley (three) charged into our cabin demanding breakfast!

It was very straightforward going through the Dodd Narrows at slack water. All the traffic was going in the same direction and there was plenty of space. Many boats announced their transit on the VHF.

For this second week we had planned short voyages, eating in restaurants and plenty of time for the three- and five-year-old boys to have some time onshore. Not all went to plan. After motoring/sailing 15 miles we arrived at Thetis Island Marina, carefully chosen because of its shop and restaurant. Well, the "marina" was a couple of pontoons, known in Canada as slips, the shop had hardly any food and the restaurant was closed! We still hadn't fully appreciated that the Salish Islands are a little remote and that getting staff was a problem. The

recent bank holiday had also emptied the shop of most of the food!

Nothing daunted, we got into the dinghy and motored up to the other "marina". After a walk we found an amazing shop with plenty of frozen sausages and fresh fruit and vegetables. There were no staff, it was run totally on an honour system: you either left cash or paid by bank transfer! We explored the beach finding lots of crabs and starfish and the boys had their first attempt at using an outboard. Can't start them too young!

Wed 10 August Careful timing was required to get us through the Gabriola Passage at slack water. This was our longest voyage with our young crew members, and they needed plenty of entertaining. We started off motoring and as the wind gradually increased, we soon had got everyone involved in putting up the sails and steering. Before we knew it, in the Pylades Channel the wind was 20kt and we were having a very exciting sail. By the time we had reefed, the wind dropped, and we were ready to motor through the Passage. We had heard on Channel 16 that there were a lot of logs around and indeed we had to keep a very sharp lookout to avoid logs of all shapes and sizes, some longer than us!

The restaurant at Silva Bay had burnt down the previous year but they had a very well stocked shop with some excellent frozen meals. There was a nice picnic area for the crew to relax....

Thursday 11 August It wasn't a great distance back to Nanaimo where our crew needed to depart. We had time to make a lunchtime stop at Pirates Cove. It was gently drizzling as we crept through yet another narrow and shallow rock-strewn entrance. After we set our anchor, a shore party went off to find the Treasure Chest. The children took a selection of small dinosaurs and colouring pencils donated by the locals. There was unimaginable pleasure in finding a Treasure Chest at Pirates Cove!

All too soon we were back at Nanaimo waving off our children and grandchildren, and wondering when we would see them all again. ➤

Our overall impressions

Positive

- It's a great sailing area and the scenery is stunning
- Canadian people are extremely friendly and helpful
- Berthing fees and fuel cost are reasonable
- The marine wildlife is magnificent– we saw seals, whales, and orcas as well as many sea birds.
- The limited fetch and presence of islands means that the maximum wave height is rarely more than 3m
- We had a great time!

Less positive

- There is plenty of rain!
- Food and alcohol are relatively expensive
- Salish weather is very variable. The temperature even in winter rarely drops below zero and in summer can reach up to 30°C. It can change rapidly.
- In summer the predominant winds are from the northeast, but topography can cause local strong winds in any direction.
- It is important to be aware of the tides, particularly anchoring in bays and transiting narrows. Nanaimo Yacht Charter sends a diver down after every charter to check for grounding damage.



Friday 13 August We had a few days left on our charter, so we opted to go north towards Jedediah Island. We had sailed past Deep Bay before and decided we could not anchor there. But this time we were determined to give it a go. As we approached between Jedediah and Paul Island, in the distance there seemed to be rocks where there had been none before! As we approached closer and cautiously, we realised that a log raft had been anchored obstructing about half the passage. There was still plenty of room to pass through, but we did wonder whether it would have been lit at night.

We found a spot to anchor and located a suitable ring on the steep rocks surrounding the bay. Copying other boats we threaded our stern line through the ring and back to our boat like a slip – so we could adjust our lines if needed.

After we had settled down, we went ashore to walk the trails across to the other side of the island. We passed through a forest of tall Douglas firs and arbutus, then through an overgrown meadow. We saw a good number of wild sheep and goats, and almost at the other end of the island an old homestead, now in a dangerous state of repair. On our return to Deep Bay we were invited aboard a motor yacht and had a lovely evening with couple originally from England, who had come to Canada for a

holiday 30 years ago and never left!

Saturday 14 August We awoke to a dull, gusty morning. I popped on deck and said “hi” to our neighbour on the motorboat and mentioned to him that he seemed quite near to the rocks. He replied cheerily that the depths were deep, right up to the land. So I went below for breakfast. When I came back the motorboat was firmly stuck on the rocks! Our motor yacht friends from the previous night were already unmooring to help. Bob jumped into the dinghy and went to help from the land. Bob put a log under the boat, and got the owner on board ready to receive the tow rope, which broke! Eventually another mariner got a thicker rope and gradually, with a lot of blue engine exhaust, the motorboat was freed. He thanked everyone profusely and headed off. Luckily his boat had a keel and propellor protector and was unlikely to have been damaged. By now I was convinced that our own anchor was dragging and we left in short order. Outside our little bay the wind really was howling.

I was determined to have a tranquil mooring for the night. We had a demanding sail/motor to Madeira Park at Pender Harbour. Strong winds and a nasty chop were the order of the day, with shallows, rocks and racing yachts to contend with. As we entered the huge

bay of Pender everything changed: the sun shone and there was a gentle breeze. There were hundreds of boats absolutely everywhere in nooks and crannies around the shoreline. We headed for the municipal “slips” at Madeira Park. As we had phoned ahead, we were helped in by the wharfinger. The end of our slip was reserved for floatplanes – it seemed crazy to share a parking spot with an aircraft! I was very happy to be back into civilisation – at least for one night.

Sunday 15 August Smugglers Cove has a narrow rocky entrance followed by a selection of berthing spots depending on the draft of your boat and your confidence in your depth sounder. It was delightful inside the cove – picturesque, sheltered, warm and full of wildlife. We tied back to the land, taking great care to have plenty of scope on our anchor chain. Once settled and after chatting to our neighbours we went ashore for a great walk on the well-marked trails through the forest around the bay.

Monday 16 August Our final sailing day! We had a great sail back to Nanaimo and at last managed to see a group of three orcas. Then sadly it was time to pack and get ready for our long trip back to England.

Bob and Isabel Joce have been sailing around the Mediterranean for more than ten years but are now, much to their surprise, enjoying a few seasons in Croatia.



How green is your sailing?

Cathy Brown wonders if it's worth using eco-friendly washing up liquid, given that boating activities can be environmentally unfriendly in many other ways

It might be tempting to think that sailing is a "green" activity -- yachts being propelled by an entirely renewable and carbon-free energy source.

But even at the time when boats were built of sustainable timber and sails made from compostable cotton, there was an environmental downside: varnish, antifoul, petrol (in those days) or diesel "auxiliaries", and so on.

Today's GRP hulls and petrochemical-derived sail materials have a vastly greater carbon footprint. Engines are bigger – no longer mere auxiliaries. And what about motorboats? How can we justify the fossil fuels we burn just for pleasure?

It's an uncomfortable conundrum. Most sailors are highly environmentally aware: the very reason we enjoy our sport is that it brings us closer to nature. The birdlife, the marine life, the amazing scenery – it's why we are drawn to the water. But it can feel hypocritical to insist on eco-friendly washing-up liquid while knowingly damaging the ozone layer.

The sad truth is that pollution has been an increasing problem since the dawn of the industrial age – from which we have all benefitted. It is only relatively recently that we have become aware of the damage we are doing to the planet.

It is easy to sympathise with the existential despair (if not the methods) of those who protest about the hopelessness of it all. As they point out, there is no Planet B.

So should we all simply tie up our boats

and walk away? Would that really help? Isn't it better to take a "staycation" (or indeed a world cruise) on a yacht rather than adding to the far greater tonnage of carbon emissions caused by holiday flights?

And what about the enormous contribution boating and all its subsidiary industries make to the global economy? Would it really help the environmental battle if all those people were thrown out of work, and all their taxes – used in no small part to tackle climate-related issues – disappeared?

Would it help the environmental battle if everyone in the boating industry was thrown out of work, and all their taxes disappeared?

We must all follow our consciences, just as we have to do with all our other pollution-causing activities, from heating our homes to driving our cars. It might be nice if we could be as pure as Greta Thunberg, but in the short-term anyway, that would probably cause at least as many problems as it might solve.

I take comfort in the butterfly effect theory – that if we all seek to make a small difference, it can result in a very large change.

When I first started sailing, back in the seventies, it was the norm for yachties (and all other maritime traffic, even large cruise ships) to dump rubbish overboard. This has long been universally recognised

The dream: recyclable sails with solar panels on a Spirit yacht. Photo, Spirit Yachts / Waterline Media



as simply unacceptable, and the oceans are cleaner as a result -although plastics remain an ever-increasing concern.

Most yachtsmen are working to make the sea cleaner, through everything from joining beach-cleans to yes, using eco-friendly washing-up liquid. Sadly, we know we will leave a nasty carbon footprint when our beloved GRP hull eventually goes to be recycled, but in the meantime we can surely be allowed to carry on using it with a relatively clear conscience – providing we never lose sight of our environmental responsibilities.

And we can rejoice in exciting new initiatives, like using fuel cells instead of generators, electric propulsion in place of diesel, and technologies that only recently seemed like the stuff of dreams – for example sails that act as solar panels, fuelling lights, navigation instruments and more – which are starting to come on stream.

It seems there's still plenty to look forward to.

Cathy, a former editor of *Cruising*, is exploring new options with her husband Richard on their motor boat, *Attitude*. In their Arcona 410 *Brave* and her sailing predecessors they raced and cruised from Spain to Sweden and sailed around the UK and Ireland.

