

Late Channel Hop

For my last trip of the year I chose a Channel Island Cruise with BOSS starting on 15th October from Hamble point marina, with promises of warm weather and secluded anchorages.

Melvyn had kindly rearranged the Ocean theory class so that I did not miss a lesson and I set off from home with the news of Hurricane Ophelia causing damage to the south and west coasts.

On arrival, Ophelia was well established and I was beginning to think it was not a good time for a channel crossing, but the skipper and crew were there, keen, and ready for the off. However it would still be blowing 7/8 on Monday so not a good time to start off across the channel.

We had decided to set off on Monday morning and stop over in Yarmouth for the night. Unfortunately the repairs necessary to our boat "Inspiration of Boss" a very old Sigma 38 were delayed. While waiting I noticed that the sun had turned a strange red in colour which I later found out was due Ophelia picking up sand from the Sahara desert. We eventually slipped our lines at about 1400 and were confronted with strong foul wind and tide as we went down the western Solent, and after a few hours of heavy sailing we reached Yarmouth.

After the night in Yarmouth marina and a few drinks in the Bugle on Tuesday morning we set off across the Channel, the forecast "calm" had arrived but due to the wind direction Cherbourg was the chosen destination. We had a moderate to rough passage and by sunset we had 20 nautical mile to go, then with the help of two very bright quick flashing leading lights we arrived at Cherbourg marina at 2200 bst.

Wednesday morning saw some fair weather and by delaying our departure until 1100 we caught a fair tide to Alderney, on the way to the race we hit 12 knots arriving in Braye in good time for a walk ashore. We were lucky however, as the water taxi driver told us as they were just about to take the rib out in preparation for the "blow" due on Saturday. It was the very end of the season so the marina office did not charge us for the mooring.

The plan had been for a Channel Island Cruise, but studying the forecast, knocked that on the head, as the only small window for the return passage was Thursday and it would be prudent to arrive well before dark, which would also fit well with the tides at the Needles.

With the forecast and tides in mind we decided to set off for at 5:30 on Thursday morning with a shake at 4:45. Unfortunately the skippers watch was set to French time so he got us all up at 3:45 and it wasn't until we had brewed the tea that we noticed. At least this gave us a good early start. We set off from Braye in the dark with moderate seas and the wind from the east, it was forecast to veer to the south west and increase. By mid morning early the forecast proved correct and we had a good broad reach making 8 knots towards our destination. The early start and good speed had us reaching the needles two early for the tide which was just on springs so the option was to either slow down or head for Poole. With the forecast for the wind to pick up again we decided to push on and head for Poole. We arrived in the early evening which gave us time for a shower and meal before a trip to the Jolly Sailor.

The problem now was our passage to the Solent as the forecast was for another storm to arrive on Friday. This I later found out was Storm Brian. It looked like there would be a small window in the forenoon so another early start was needed. During the night a force 8/9 pounded Poole and by morning it had abated to a 6/7. We waited until the storm eased and set off mid morning in a force 5/6 in Poole harbour. On exiting Poole we set course for the needles under just a storm jib and with a following sea and a westerly force 7 we made 8 knots towards the Isle of White. The swell was big as we surfed towards the needles, we did not want to be pushed onto the Shingles so we decided to take the northern channel to enter the Solent rather than the needles channel.

We arrived back at Hamble on Friday a couple of days early a bit battered but elated by the experience.

So for now it's back to the homework, thinking about what happens when we cross the international date line, where to find Betelgeuse, and looking forward to next summer.

Bill Hill

