

The Cruise of Magic from Guernsey to La Rochelle - 2019

St Peter Port to Roscoff – Monday 10th June 2019 – 73 miles

“Magic” crewed by myself and Paul Frampton had returned, to Guernsey, from the Seaward Squadron Rally, in Dartmouth, on Sun 8th June, with the intention of having a rest day in Guernsey, before starting our passage to Brittany. However, the forecast for Tuesday was not good, strong winds and rain. The decision was made to make a run for it. We re-fuelled in the morning and set off after lunch. We departed at 14:20 and were berthing in Roscoff at 18:17, a distance of 72 miles on the log. We had a good run down with the wind force 3 -4 NNW. The marina was surprisingly empty when we arrived, which we found out was because they were expecting 50 plus yachts from the La Solitaire Furgó Le Figaro race, which was due to arrive on the Wednesday.

Tuesday 11th June

The morning started with the blustery wet weather that had been forecast, which then moderated during the day. In the afternoon we walked into the town to explore.

In the evening we had a meal in the marina bar and were surprised to find that they had Ormers on the menu!

The Ormer is a sea snail found around the Channel Islands. In Guernsey, harvesting is restricted, and Ormers can only be caught on certain tides in the spring. The rules in place are aimed to make life inconvenient for those who wish to catch them, forbidding the wearing of wetsuits or the hunters putting their heads under water.

The opportunity to taste them was not to be missed, however we found it difficult to see what the fuss was all about!



Roscoff to Benodet - Wednesday 12th June – 106 miles

The weather had improved slightly, and we decided to set off from Roscoff after lunch. Our planned destination was Camaret, with the option to divert to L'Aber Wrac'h, if the seas proved to be hard going.

It was neap tide and although we were punching tide to get to the Chenal du Four at slack water, we made good time. We were kept busy avoiding the competitors of La Solitaire as they made their way to Roscoff. As we turned south in to the Chenal du Four, the sea moderated and with a fair tide, behind us, we were making good time. A decision was made



to proceed straight down through the Raz de Seine and onto Benodet. Arriving in time for supper, we berthed on the long visitor's pontoon at Sainte Marine and enjoyed a welcome meal at Le Café du Port.

Roscoff to Concarneau - Thursday 13th June – 16 miles

Keen to make progress and as we had visited the Odet River on previous cruises, we departed Sainte Marine after breakfast to make the short trip to Concarneau. On the way we called into Port la Forêt to pick up fuel. We did not get a chance to have a good look around Port la Forêt, but it seems like a very quiet marina, well worth another visit. The fuel pump is controlled, like most in France, by a Credit Card machine. You have to enter your Credit Card number and the fuel is dispensed. This pump only allowed €150.00 at a time, so at €1.57 per litre, we had to do nine transactions! If the marina office had been open, we may have been able to override this, but they were closed for a long lunch. After our own lunch we moved on to Concarneau.



Concarneau to Ile de Groix – Friday 14th June – 24 miles

This was another short run of only 24 miles, and we arrived just after mid-day. The marina at Port Tudy, Ile de Groix is small. There were a number of spare berths on the visitor's pontoon when we arrived, but these filled by mid-afternoon; we were pleased we had arrived early.

The island is often compared to Alderney, there are a few bars and small restaurants around the harbour and then there is a stiff walk up to the village at Le Bourg. We enjoyed a fine plate of Langoustine at La Safran, in the square by the church.

One of the restaurants by the harbour acts a Depot de Pain, so there is no need to walk up to the village in the morning.



Ile de Groix to Piriac sur Mer - Sunday 16th June – 38 miles



Chatting to another skipper, on the pontoon, we were encouraged to visit Piriac sur Mer. It was not originally on our route plan but we thought it worth a look. The marina dries at low water with a plateau that extends for over a mile to the north and west. The pilot book gives access as HW \pm 3 hours, but it is worth checking the web site as the figures given are more generous. We departed Ile de Groix at 11:30 and wended our way through the southern hazards of the Quiberon Peninsular and north of the islands of Houat and Hoedic.



We arrived shortly before HW, where we were met by harbour staff, who directed us to a berth. In the visitor's area there is a long pontoon to starboard and several, good sized figure berths to port. The village of Piriac is very attractive with several bars and restaurants along the harbour-side and pretty narrow streets.

Piriac sur Mer to Ile d'Yeu – Monday 17th June – 41 miles

Although Piriac is worth a longer visit we were keen to press on and so left shortly after breakfast. The wind was F4 – F5 from the SW which produced a good swell. There was a lot of spray, but 'Magic' managed the conditions well and we arrived at Port Joinville, Ile d'Yeu in time for lunch.



As you enter the harbour you pass the long breakwater and then hard to port into the marina. As there are ferries operating, keep an eye open for the red lights that control activity.

When we arrived, the marina was fairly empty, with plenty of space, both alongside Pontoon A and on the finger berths on Pontoon B. We originally tied up on 'A' but when we checked in, we were told that a large fleet of yachts was expected later in the day and we were recommended to move to a finger on pontoon 'B'. We were pleased we did so as by the evening boats were rafted up 5 deep. The marina staff are very helpful and are led by Lesley, who hails from Scotland, so language is no problem.



Ile d'Yeu is a lovely island with a Mediterranean feel, the buildings are mostly painted white and have red tiled roofs. We enjoyed sitting in the harbour side bars, having a drink and watching the world go by. In the evening we enjoyed a memorable meal at 'Restaurant 9'. On the second day we rented electric bikes and cycled right round the island. The island is fairly flat, so it was easy going. In fact, cycles, of many shapes and sizes, are the main form of transport, with very few cars. We were told that at the peak of the season, there are over 30,000 bikes on the roads.



Ile d'Yeu to La Rochelle – Wednesday 19th June – 59 miles

We knew that the gate into the Vieux Marina at La Rochelle did not open until 16:45 so we depart Ile d'Yeu around 11:00, which would give us time to make the passage and call into Les Minimes Marina for fuel. We found the fuel pontoon easily and tied up. The pumps were again controlled by Credit Card, this time allowing €300.00 value at a time. This meant several transactions as we wanted to have full tanks for the return passage. After we had completed our process, we were told that the fuel pump at the end of the pontoon, nearest the entrance to the marina, is not restricted. But by then it was too late!

The Minimes is a vast marina, fine if you are just stopping on route but we were heading for Vieux Port which is right in the middle of the town.

There are in fact two areas to the Vieux Port, the Bassin á Flot, mainly local boats and visitors <10M and the Bassin des Chalutiers >12M. The basin is accessed by a gate which opens 2 hr 30 before HW until 1 hr30 after HW and a bridge which lifts several times over this period.

Times for the bridge lifts are available from the <https://www.portlarochelle.com>

web site. While waiting for entry, hang back from the entrance, as there will invariably be boats exiting and they will need space to manoeuvre.

The Bassin des Chalutiers has two long pontoons, one down each side of the marina and a central pontoon with finger berths, these are all 12 metres long so there is plenty of space. When we were there it was never more than 2/3rd full but is worth checking ahead to make sure that there is no big event planned.

Lay over in La Rochelle Thursday 20th June – Saturday 6th July

I had been accompanied on the first part of my cruise, by my good friend Paul Frampton. The plan now was for us to leave the boat in La Rochelle and to fly home. There are two flights a week to Southampton and onward flights to Guernsey. There is a good bus service, from close by the marina, to the airport, with a fare of only €1.50.

I would then have a few days at home before flying back with Ann on the following Tuesday.

Ann was with me for eleven days, before she flew home and my brother Mike flew out from Bristol, ready for the cruise back to Guernsey.

La Rochelle is a vibrant city with lots of narrow streets





to explore; the marina is surrounded by bars and cafes where you can sit and watch the world go by. There are lots of restaurants crowded around the main harbour, but these seemed a bit touristy. We found two, not far from the marina that we preferred - La Marée, which is just by the Aquarium and an Italian restaurant, Ragazzi da Peppone, in Rue Saint Nicolas.

During our time in La Rochelle we made two, day trips. Firstly, by bus to Ile de Ré and then on another day, by train to Rochefort.

The trip to Ile de Ré gave us a chance to explore the marina at St Martin de Ré, it is quite small but in a lovely location and well worth a visit.

We were not impressed by the marina at Rochefort, full of boats that had not moved for years, although the town was worth a visit.

La Rochelle to Ile d'Yeu - Sunday 7th July – 54 miles

Our original plan was to stay in La Rochelle until Monday 8th July, but we had learnt that Port Joinville, Ile d'Yeu, was expecting another large yacht rally, so we decided to leave La Rochelle on the Sunday and get a comfortable berth, while we could.



We left La Rochelle on the second bridge lift and we had a pleasant, four-hour cruise, arriving in time for lunch. The marina was busier than on our last visit, but we found a convenient finger berth and tied up. That afternoon we were relaxing in the cockpit when I heard my name called, friends Chris and Jane Pink arrived on their Nauticat. Chris and Jane previously owned a Seaward 35 and we had met them in Scotland, as well on several Seaward Rallies.



Next day, we again hired electric bikes and explored the island. Although I had done this on the previous visit, the island is so pretty and the electric bikes so easy to ride, it was no hardship. When we came back from our ride the marina had filled with nearly 100 yachts so our decision to come a day early proved correct. Moored on the hammerhead, alongside us was Pen Duick, the first of a series of yachts sailed by French yachtsman Eric Tabarly. We felt very privileged until the crew started singing sea shanties at 3 in the morning.

Ile d'Yeu to Port Haliguen – Wednesday 10th July - 51 miles

After breakfast we reluctantly left Ile d'Yeu. Our destination was Port Haliguen on the Quiberon Peninsular, on the way we decided to call into the small island of Ile d'Hoedic. Here there is a small harbour with a pontoon with a few short fingers and then three large buoys. Most of the visiting boats raft on these buoys. We didn't bother to tie up but just dropped the anchor and enjoyed our lunch. We had been warned that the Port Haliguen was in the progress of major refurbishment and it was not clear where the visitor's area was, but we called up on CH 9 and were met by the harbour dory and directed to a good-sized finger berth. The work is in the final stages and should be finished for next season. The harbour office have bikes that can be borrowed, free of charge, for a few hours and we took advantage of these and cycled into the town of Quiberon. This is a typical French seaside holiday town with fine beaches and lots of cafes and restaurants.

Port Haliguen to Étel – Friday 11th July – 16 miles

I had read about the River Étel many times in the pilot books and they tend to make it seem very complicated with "labyrinthine pilotage, maelstroms and strong tidal streams". We were enjoying very settled weather, so we decided to take a look. We followed the guidance given and timed our arrival for local HW -1 hour. Half a mile off, we called the Semaphore Station on CH 13 and asked, in our best French, for permission to enter. We were told simply "come straight in".



The flood tide was still running fairly strongly but was it no problem. We were met outside the harbour and were asked if we wanted to berth on the pontoon alongside, the outside of the harbour wall or inside the harbour. We requested an inside berth, which is the better choice, as it is out of the tidal stream and much quieter. Étel is a lovely village, arranged along the riverside. There are several restaurants and bars and we enjoyed a fine meal in Restaurant Le BB.



The harbour office staff are very friendly and offered us bikes to borrow, free for up to three hours, or to rent for longer times. On our second day in Étel we decided to rent electric bikes and cycled to Carnac to see the stones, thousands of prehistoric standing stones.



Étel to Benodet – Saturday 13th July – 37 miles

We crept out of Étel about two hours before H.W. and had about a metre under the keel as we slid over the bar, the wind was very light and there was hardly a ripple. We cruised slowly westward and were joined by a school of Dolphin for a time.

We had refuelled, to full tanks, in La Rochelle and now had to give some thought to how much fuel we needed to get us home. We were familiar with the fuel pontoon at Benodet so decided to put 150 litres in each tank, which we thought would be enough to get us to Guernsey. We were pleased we did not require more as the price was €1.74 per litre. As the weather was so calm, we picked up a buoy and spent the evening in the peace and quiet of the river.

Benodet to L'Aber Wrac'h – Sunday 14th July – 66 miles

After a relaxing night, moored in the river off Benodet, we set off to reach the Raz de Sein at slack water and before the north going stream started to build in strength. We had a way plan with the idea to make as much distance as possible. The tide would carry us north through the Chenal du Four and then west along the coast towards Roscoff or Treguier. However, as we approached Chenal du Four, the wind increased in strength considerably and as it was straight on the nose, it gave uncomfortable wind against tide conditions, so we decided to divert into L'Aber Wrac'h. The harbour was very busy, but the harbour staff directed us to a berth on the inside of the southern wave break. The wind had increased to a good F5 -F6, and as the berth was into the wind, it took a couple of attempts before we could get a line ashore and securely tied up.



L'Aber Wrac'h is an attractive harbour and well worth a visit. It is well placed for beginning a passage around 'the corner' to South Brittany. Many boats stay just one night but it is well worth a longer stay.

We spent next morning walking up into the village and then back, to the marina, around the coast. In the evening we enjoyed a very good value meal at the L'Ecailler des Abers.



L'Aber Wrac'h to St Peter Port – Tuesday 16th July – 107 miles

Tuesday dawned fine and settled and we had a smooth run up to Guernsey, a fine end to our summer cruise. As we were early for the sill opening to QEII marina, we dropped anchor in Fermain Bay and had a cup of tea.

I am pleased to say my calculations of fuel capacity were correct and although we did not have an excess of diesel left, I reckoned we had a range of 70 miles in hand. It was a pleasure to fill up next week in Guernsey at just .58p a litre.



Summary of our Cruise.

Cruising the South Brittany Coast is a fantastic experience, there are so many interesting places to visit, marinas and river anchorages, historic towns and many islands, all with their own characters.

We travelled just under 700 miles on our trip and am pleased to be able to say that "Magic" behaved herself admirably. She is a lovely boat to cruise on, with plenty of space to live comfortably and able to handle any sea conditions that you may encounter.

I would like to thank my crew that made the trip possible, Paul Frampton, on the way to La Rochelle; my brother, Mike for his company on the way home and Ann for her companionship in La Rochelle.

If you are planning to visit Normandy or Brittany is worth visiting the web site:

<https://www.digimap.gg/marine/marinas/> - here you will find a wealth of information

There is also a Facebook Group - **Brittany & Normandy Group, France Marina** - latest news is published here that you will find useful.

