

Graham and Sue's Brittany Diary July – September 2000

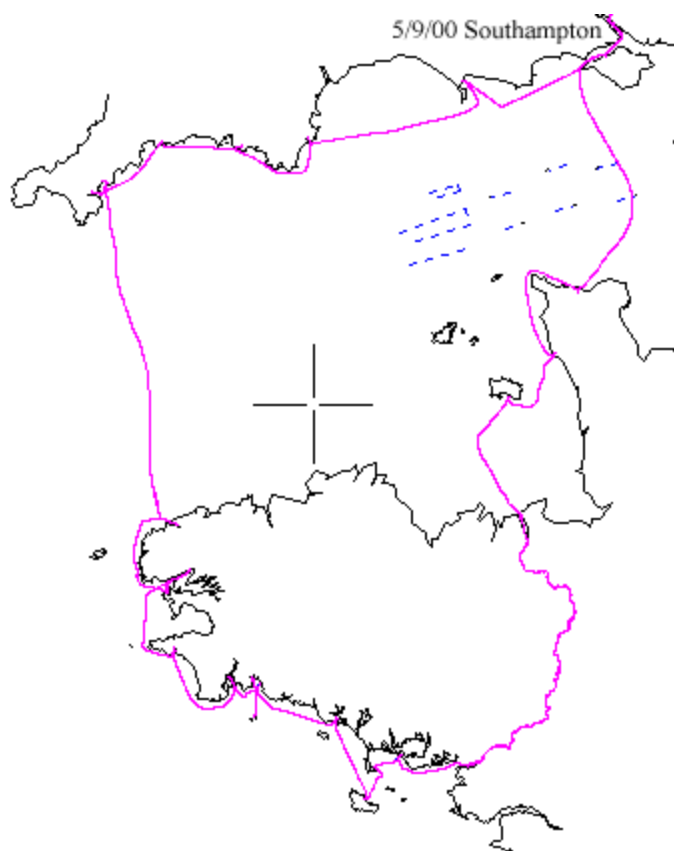


Fig. 1 Our Voyage, 3rd July - 5 September 2000

Tuesday 4th July. At 5am in Newtown after a night filled with the quarrels of nesting gulls, the morning seemed to offer sufficient promise to cross the Channel. By six o'clock it was raining and continued to do so ALL DAY! The rain caused the visibility to be greatly reduced; the word which springs to mind to describe it is grey; grey sea, grey sky...the Isle of Wight disappearing quickly into the murky greyness. And we in full oil-skins, completely drenched. There probably were dozens of large craft in the shipping lanes but we saw only two and one of those was almost too close for comfort. We struggled to make out things in the gloom, but the most diverting thing we saw was a large gull using a floating pallet as a raft. And seaweed....

About two hours off Cherbourg a watery sun put in a belated appearance but not for long! We had just caught a hazy glimpse of the coast of France when...hey presto.... fog appeared and the visibility became very bad, probably only about 200 metres. But with our trusty navigational aids we arrived right at the entrance seeing almost nothing at all except lobster pots and, in the Petit Rade, a gigantic high-speed ferry. So now we feel very tired after all the PEERING; it's very exhausting trying to make things out in fog.

I am aware that this first diary entry sounds just as dull as the weather, but here we are safely in Cherbourg at the beginning of our long Brittany adventure ...

Actually Sue wrote the last entry, I just posted it, this is me (G)... Wed 5th July. We woke up to sound of the Norman bell of the Cherbourg eglise, 5am, 6 French time. Cherbourg is as usual – there is a lot going on e.g. The Tour de France, the Tour Voile 2000. Plentiful sea food (we have already eaten moules and huitres).

We have adjusted to French time, and are ready for *dejeuner* at the correct time etc... We have spent our first day relaxing, doing a little shopping and enjoying the sun, (some clouds). Totally different weather from yesterday - all wet clothing, oilies etc now dry!

On the subject of the fog yesterday, it moved north – we spoke to someone who came across about 6 hours behind us who had fog in the shipping lanes, but Cherbourg was clear – I know which I prefer! We may move on to Carteret tomorrow, or not as the case may be – more then....

We left Cherbourg on the 6th since the weather promised to be bad from that evening onwards, but the day was quite good, (i.e. not actually pissing with rain and blowing a hoolie). We wanted to get to Carteret as early as possible - which you can do on one tide. We had a good sail with flat seas (except for Cap de la Hague which always seems to be lumpy whatever the weather), arriving at Carteret about 1.5 hours before the sill of the marina was theoretically open – so we anchored outside off the beach and waited for the water. There was a whole gaggle of local fishing boats waiting to get in as well so we knew we hadn't completely miscalculated the tides!

While we were waiting the rain and stronger winds came, just as forecast - anyway the tide eventually arrived and we made our way into the strangely quiet visitors' berths. Another yacht which had sailed



round with us, having not "done" Carteret before, followed us in. It rained all night – but we were snug enough. Today the 7th was brighter and drier, so we got our washing done and dried all the oilies (again). The plan for tomorrow is to move on to St Helier in Jersey – thence on to St Malo next week.

Fig. 2 Marina at Carteret

– note the "Infinity Pool" effect at low tide

Two days in Carteret was enough since the weather was not too hot. The People who followed us in, Chris and Sally Cooper (Force Majeure), also Cruising Association members, arrived a few minutes behind us and we helped them tie up. We joined them for a large scotch before turning in. They were bound for St Helier also so after two days of Carteret we all left for Jersey.

We decided to go south around the Violet Bank, since it would be more sheltered from the F 4-5 NW winds that we had, (see progress chart – if Lewis has posted it on the web site). The trip was good (only a little rain!) and we arrived safely in Collette basin at about 1600 BST. Force Majeure having arrived before us, helped us to berth this time by moving a French motor cruiser up the pontoon a little.

What did we do in Jersey? Well, since the we had foul weather all we did was shopping, walking (mostly to the shops) and, oh yes, the highlight was taking a bus to Jersey Zoo a really wonderful zoo founded by Gerald Durrell in 1959 – Really great, in fact as Sue said it was worth going just for the plants. The apes were v. interesting, as were the brightly coloured poisonous frogs.

We were port bound in St Helier for 3 days! Eventually we had a weather window on Wed 12th July so we left at 8 AM for St Malo. This was the best trip so far from the point of view of the weather i.e. we had a little sun but not enough to get excited about! We had light W / SW winds and a good sail W round the Plateau des Minquiers which, (for non sailing readers), is a v. large rocky area which dries

and is inconveniently placed between Jersey and St Malo! During this part of the trip we made radio contact with “Turning Point” Chris and Sue Thomas. We were both heading for the NW Minquiers buoy from opposite directions – anyway we passed within a couple of miles of each other and Chris took a picture of us – we were the left hand sail...

The sun appeared in a cameo role here today – tomorrow is Bastille Day!!!



Fig. 3 Oyster Heaven

14th July -We decided to while away the day by getting a bus to Cancale, small town NE of St Malo renowned for its oysters – sort of oyster heaven for oyster lovers. Anyway – missed the bloody bus so had to take a taxi instead (bussed back). Ate oysters and moules visited the “oyster museum” , bought more oysters for supper. Got back to the boat about 7:30 PM – cooked oysters so Sue could eat them too. Finished supper just in time to stroll along the prom so watch the “Spectactacle” - nothing happened!!! It was cancelled due to beaucoup de vent!! – Miffed - anyway sailed away next day.

15th July - Through the Rance barrage via the lock. It was lowish tide so the levels were much the same. However when we were through we had a 4 Knot tide with us up the first part of the Rance, sailing with just jib we did 8 knots OG at one point. Stopped at a nice little town Plouer small quite marina – very friendly. First marina I’ve stayed in that takes orders for bread and croissants for the following morning when you tie up the boat!

16th July – On through the Chatillier lock and so on to Dinan. Very picturesque. Had to tie up alongside a wall opposite the quay. But the following day got a berth next to a couple from Jersey who have done the canal several times and are proving to be a mine of information. Started preparing for mast removal tomorrow More then - (Sue will want to make an entry about Dinan)

Saturday 22nd July – The eighteenth of July was our anniversery,36th!), but more importantly was the day our mast came down! A time, as I am sure you will appreciate, fraught with anxiety for the skipper but all passed off well and the boat was ready to go inland! Dinan was preparing itself for its annual Medieval Fete which attracts thousands of pleasure seekers, so we slipped our moorings and motored off deeper into the canal system of Bretagne. (Thanks to Napoleon!) (Incidentally, Dinan is a most interesting and picturesque town, full of half-timbered, wonky buildings with amazingly steep cobbled streets.) ...



Fig. 4 Cruising Down the River



Fig. 5 Tied up at an old quay with some cows

Since then we have been making our way southwards via the system of locks until this evening, which finds us in Betton having achieved eleven downhill locks today, (which is nothing compared to the Ladder of Hades which we climbed yesterday...going up locks is much more exciting and swirly than going down which is relatively tranquil. We have seen vividly blue kingfishers, dragonflies, a swimming snake and we wake to the sound of woodland birds instead of seagulls. More anon....

Monday 24th July – We woke on Sunday (in Betton) to the sound of clanking – a Sunday market on the quayside – which was very convenient for the morning baguette and fruit. It also caused us to leave early! We stopped briefly for lunch just outside Rennes which we decided to pass straight through since, although interesting, was not in our opinion worth stopping being mostly derelict dockland frontage and development sites. A note on lunch – the locks close at 1200 until 1330 so wherever you are you just have to stop for déjeuner. – Anyway last night we made Port de Pont Rean (sorry no accents should be “e acute”). Sue made a nice casserole de boeuf – it rained later.



Fig. 5 Merde il pleut

Monday (today as I write this) we have only passed through four locks – the distances between them are becoming greater and the river Villaine wider, as we get nearer to the sea. There is also a noticeable current (with us). We stopped tonight in a little marina just off the river at Messac. Tomorrow we hope to reach Redon, where you can have your mast put up, however we are planning to do ours further down at La Roche Bernard so we can enjoy Redon which sounds like an interesting town.

25th July - Redon was OK with a large marina – trouble was the berth we were allocated was several 100 m from the loos!, however it was v. close to an artisanne boulanger. Did a megga wash in a launderette at Redon. Met some v nice people Willie and Angela, from Falmouth in a classic Falmouth oyster dredger, the Mary C. They had taken part in the Brest 2000 classic boat event as the first part of their trip. They gave us some good local information about the Falmouth area for our return voyage.

27th July Left Redon for La Roche Bernard. Soon after departure it started to rain and continued all morning, however we had the spray hood up and Sue rigged an umbrella on the mast behind it and we steered using the autopilot remote control from under this protection !

Picked up a mooring in the river and stopped for dejeuner. Rain stopped and we went on to La Roche Bernard in the PM. Berthed in the Old Port – very pretty and friendly, we shall stay here a few days.



Fig. 6 La Roche Bernard (the old port)

Discovered that they cannot put the mast up here until next week so had to make an appointment to have it done at Arzal tomorrow (Friday 28th). Arzal is about 5km down stream. Left for Arzal and mast....

Well the mast went OK - they did it with a new travel hoist of which they are v. proud. After a little misunderstanding – we thought they were going to lift the boat – they lifted the mast onto the shore so that I could reinstall all the gadgets on the top before they put it up. (Sue was pleased because I don't have to go up the mast). Looked at the barrage for future reference and returned to La Roche Bernard to finish off the jobs.

Sunday 30st Left La Roche Bernard sailed back to Arzal to refuel as a jumping off point for the barrage lock. Nice to sail again and to check everything works!

Monday 31st through the lock at the Arzal Barrage, and what a lock – total chaos!! It's a v. big lock and quite deep – nearly all yachts, about 8 or 9, + 1 or 2 small motor boats, oh and also wind from behind as we entered plus a slight current also from behind. We were about 3rd boat in, so had to go up to the far end. The boat ahead of us missed the chains and slewed round sideways, nearly all the boats including us had similar difficulties when they tried to stop – nightmare.... Since the tide was nearly low on the other side we also had depth problems after leaving the lock – 0.8 m - one of the boats ahead of us ran aground and stuck just outside the lock! We have come through about 67 locks in the last month; this was by far the worst!

Anyway we escaped at low tide from the river Vilaine hoisted the sails and had a very pleasant hot sunny trip to Crouesty, a small port on the entrance of the Morbihan. Sailing in swimming costumes – actually I have to admit we both got a little burnt!

Friday 4th August...this is Susan's entry!

The port of Crouesty is another triumph of French entrepreneurial daring-do! Only a few months ago the bassin which we first entered was little more than a sparkle in the eye of the engineer and voila! In August it is a fully finished part of a modern marina. It is what you would term a “well appointed” marina with all the requirements. We arrived there on the 1st August and happily met up again with Angela and Willy in their lovely boat.

The weather has been very changeable, but Graham and I hiked out across the peninsula on the 2nd to get our first proper look at the Morbihan. The wind was blowing from the north-west and it was about two hours after low water and the tide was still rushing out. Our viewing point was quite elevated and so we had a wonderful view of the current and counter currents...and you should have seen the struggle which yachts had to get in through the narrow entrance; some just simply stopped, even went backwards and those with the most local knowledge managed to pick their way through. Very exhilarating to watch let alone to do! Conversely of course, those going out simply hurtled at a speed which seemed amazing. I must add that the track we took from the little town of Arzon took us through fields where there were butterflies in such abundance, some of which I had never seen before. The next day we walked again, this time to Port Navalo; again a marvellous view over the Morbihan. Later that evening we shared a dinner with Angela and Willy, who introduced us to the joy of eating clams and cockles!

So to today...after a leisurely breakfast we started out on a modest passage to Haliguen; only about eight nautical miles. The wind was NW, generally around force 3 to 4 and we had a jolly sail. This place is very much a stop-over and one wouldn't want to stay here for any length of time, so tomorrow we shall be off again. But to where??????????

5/8/00 Well - we went to Belle Isle – It may be a beautiful island and indeed we anchored outside the port of Le Palais and swam, rowed ashore, lunched, sunbathed etc. waiting for the lock into the “Basin a Flot” to open at 1930 hrs. While this was going on we were joined by scores of other yachts, all being assured that “Oh yes there will be a place for you - plenty of room for all boats”. At 1930 there was a great clanking of anchor chains and a charge for the entrance, (dodging the Ferries). We waited until the initial rush was over but when we got inside there was total chaos. Well to cut a long story short I manoeuvred on tick over for nearly an hour before we got through the lock. We were lucky because of our shallow draft - we were ushered through another lifting bridge to a berth on a wall in the local marina, but most boats were rafted up in the main part of the inner harbour, about 6 deep on both sides with a boat width channel up the middle.

We escaped as early as we could the next day! We have been assured by other French sailors that it is very nice out of season but, as is says in the pilots and almanacs, Le Palais is very crowded in the season!



6/8/00 - Our next port of call was Port Louis on the right as you enter Lorient – It is a small fishing port and town and very peaceful after the noise and bustle of Le Palais. We stayed two days to recover. There is an excellent but very unassuming fish restaurant right in front of the marina.

8/8/00 – And so on to Concarneau – Sue was really looking forward to this stop and it has met her expectations. The marina is right in front of the old walled town – most attractive. We have stayed 2 days tomorrow (10/8/00) if the settled weather holds, we are off to the Glenan Isles.

Fig 7. Concarneau the famous clock tower

Well hold it did, although there was rather a dull start, so off to the Glenans – Penfret. We anchored near the coral beach and had



lunch – grilled sardines. Around 1400 the sky cleared and we had hot sunshine all afternoon, so after a siesta, we rowed the Tinker ashore, swam, beachcombed and generally checked the coral beach for Erika pollution. We are pleased to report that there is very little – no more than the odd spot of tar on the odd stone or shell, as you would expect to find on almost any beach on our polluted planet.

Fig. 8 The coral beach on Penfret



Fig. 9 The beach is made of broken white coral

We left about 1630 and headed for our next destination – Port-la-Forêt which turned out to be one of the nicest places we have stayed in so far. The wind stayed mostly west which together with the sea breeze gave us a brisk sail back. Arrived at Port la Forêt around 1830 – very big and well appointed marina for such a small place.



Let me see – a lot of water under the boat since our last entry...

We left you at Port La Forêt we liked it and stayed for 4 days – nice beach – swam. Good walks. 14/8/00 we moved on to Benodet and went up the Odet River and anchored in a very peaceful side branch about 2 miles up.

river Odet

15/8/00 bright and early start to round Pointe Penmarch to Audierne. Very nice trip mostly under sail in hot sun made special by the arrival of a school of porpoises – about 20 of them that stayed with us for some 10 minutes, diving and playing round the boat as we sailed at 5 knots. Spiritually uplifting!

Fig. 10 Peaceful anchorage off the



Fig. 11 Porpoises at Pointe Penmarch

Audierne is a good jumping off place to round Pt. De Raz via the Raz de Sein, which we did on the 17/8/00 and so on to Brest – Moulin Blanc marina. Since we were planning to stop at Camaret on the way out we didn't stop there on the way in to Brest.

Two days in Brest to wait for an additional crew member for the long haul back to the UK – One point I must make about Brest marina – It is the only marina I have ever stopped in that provides free ice cubes! Needless to say we availed ourselves of this service by the bucketful. Cold box and draining sink full to chill the wine and beer we left on the 19/8/00 for Camaret.



20/8/00. Camaret via the Chenal du Four in clear sunny weather with light winds and a spring tide so we had an easy passage through and so rounded the rugged NW point of Finesterre and on to L'Aberwrac'h where, on the advice of a fellow sailor in Brest, we went right to the top of the river and moored on a buoy in the quiet little port de Paluden.



Fig. 12 The Harbour Master at Paluden collects the mooring fees and delivers fresh fish daily

(Sue takes over from here)

What did we all do in Paluden? Well, we rowed ashore a lot and walked a lot; went up to the village for bread, (Henry went on the first morning); I walked to L'Aberwrac'h which was much further by road than by the river. I found that I didn't have enough money for a cup of tea even and walked back to Paluden where Graham brought the dinghy over to the landing stage and I slipped on the side and went in! Not right in fortunately but it looked very funny. We went for a really good meal at the Auberge du Pont and it was excellent, both food and décor very "sympa". On Wednesday 23rd the forecast was still a bit grim, so we moved down river to L'Aberwrac'h to wait for it to improve. The marina is fairly small and the port is a centre, as so many French ports are, of much sailing activity. We have been very impressed by how well organised these sailing centres are in France and have been amazed how young some of the little people are. There is a diving school there as well.

L'Aberwrac'h to Falmouth?

On Thursday 24th August the day seemed auspicious to make our attempt across the Channel, but as we were preparing to go, a thick fog enveloped the whole of the coast but we set off anyway.....

Ten miles out we were still enveloped in cold fog, with visibility down to probably less than 200 m. Not knowing how far out it extended and with the thought of twenty two or so hours of sailing ahead of us, including several busy shipping lanes, G. decided to turn back. We listened to all the weather forecasts which still did not shape up on Friday 25th, so regretfully, we had to say goodbye to Henry who left by cab for Roscoff and from thence to Plymouth by ferry as he had weekend commitments at home, (involving golf!)

Saturday 26th the forecast looked good. So armed with baguettes and cuppa-soups we set off from L'Aberwrac'h at ten o'clock French time. "The sun shone brightly on the sea, shining with all its might"; so most of the day we spent in shorts and t-shirts motor sailing along in a light westerly breeze. We crossed the separated shipping lanes with no problems and the sun went down behind low banks of cloud. It's always a bit eerie as night comes on when one is on a small boat. In spite of all the warm clothes it seemed chilly in the freshening westerly wind. We had started to sail in the late afternoon and by early evening we were skimming along at a fair old lick, with the third member of the crew, the auto-helm performing marvellously without a word of complaint. The wind grew stronger and G. was worried, strange as it may seem, that we were going too fast! You see, we didn't want to arrive at Falmouth in the dark, being a new port to G. with all the attendant rocky hazards. We shortened sail several times, ending up with a treble-reefed main and a pocket-handkerchief jib and still we skimmed along in the force 5 wind with breaking, surfy waves.

Dawn was very welcome; although there is a time when there seems to be a lightening of the sky, but it is a no-mans-land which seems not to belong to either day or night. The starlit night sky had been quite miraculous, with the mast-head swaying across the milky way. (Orion rose in the east at about three o' clock keeping one foot in the sea.) We had seen the loom of the Lizard lighthouse from very far out, but soon started to make out other lights and features. We finally tied up at the very welcoming Port Pendennis at eight o' clock English time! We slept!! After refreshing showers we walked up through the streets of Falmouth which were bustling with tourists having their final bank-holiday fling. We bought huge, hot Cornish pasties which we ate washed down with a bottle of good red wine. (Then I slept again!) We ate out as a reward for the long haul, on Cornish crab soup and Cornish lemon sole; delicious!

Today, Monday 28th August, we plan to sail up the Helford river to Port Navas, recommended to us by Willy and Angela, so more anon.....

28th August. The Helford River is very beautiful. We had a very pleasant sail there with full sail for a change, Sue helming most of the way. Arrived at about 6PM at Port Navas Sailing Club. There is no pontoon in the middle of the creek as shown in the Almanac and the CA handbook, however there is a pontoon in front of the yacht club to port, with red and green can buoys marking the channel. We moored on the end of it and true to the advice from PNSC members Willie and Angela, (see Crouesty entry), Jeff behind the bar made us very welcome. Wanted to know if we were eating at the club, which we were.



I have a cousin who lives in Constantine, a small village overlooking the Helford River, who I haven't seen for some 35 years. Since we were so close I called her and she, and her husband and daughter, who I had never met, joined us for supper at the yacht club. Very pleasant evening. Note this mooring dries out completely with a steep slope away from the pontoon.

Fig. 13 Port Navas

29th August. Helford to Fowey. Water Taxi ashore (V. Expensive - 5 Pounds return for 2!). Walked, met a nice lady watering her beautiful front garden. Sue, now suffering from acute gardening withdrawal, discussed gardens and we were invited in to see her back garden too. 30th. Pumped the dinghy up (can't afford another Water Taxi). Went over to Bodinnick on the ferry and walked around the village visited the extremely small Bodinnick church. Left after lunch at Sam's Bistro, for the Yealm River and Newton Ferrers.

30/8/00. River Yealm – Tricky sounding entrance but easy really – couldn't find a mooring so we rafted up. Forecast is beginning to sound as if some nasty weather is on the way so we decided to leave early tomorrow for Dartmouth (or possibly Salcombe). The River Yealm is not as nice as the Helford River in my opinion.

31/8/00 River Yealm to Dartmouth. Long hop this – about 31 Nm. So we set off early knowing we will have to punch the tide for some of the way. Good sail for the first bit across Bigbury Bay.

Wind going further round to the south as forecast. Off Bolt Tail and Bolt Head wind beginning to veer west of south and increase to 20 kn we have two reefs in the main and are going like a train. 8 knots water speed at times, however we are now punching a 2kn tide. At about 2 pm we are off Salcombe but the entrance can be dangerous in southerly winds so we decide to press on to Dartmouth. This involves rounding Prawle Point and Start Point both of which have heavy overfalls, especially with wind over tide which we now have since the wind has now veered west. We press on to my waypoint beyond Start Point and outside the over falls. The wind is now well behind the beam and the jib is beginning to collapse as we are slewed round by the following waves some of which are rather big. Washboards now in and hatch shut! Also we are both wearing harnesses.

At the waypoint we turn onto the course for the Dartmouth entrance – we are now on a dead run – we can't hold the main without a gybe preventer and Sue thinks it is too dangerous to set one in these conditions, so we heave to under engine, head to wind and drop the main. We now run under a pocket handkerchief jib and a little engine power to assist with steerage at speeds approaching 7 Kn towards Dartmouth entrance, still invisible ahead because of the heavy rain squalls blowing in with us. We enter the harbour (breaking the 6 Kn speed limit!). Finally raft up on the end of a pontoon in Darthaven Marina..... Phew!

1/9/00 The following day we were allocated a berth well inside the marina where we were snug until the gales had passed. We explored Dartmouth and Kingswear and went on several walks around the adjoining countryside. Good National Trust area this! Very nice pub in Kingswear called The Ship.

3/9/00. We had stayed at Dartmouth 3 nights in all. Finally left on Sunday the 3rd of Sept. for Weymouth. Arrived at Portland Bill a bit too early so kept well out (about 4 Nm) to punch the lesser tide (about 3kn max) - arrived at Weymouth after dark – The lights are a bit confusing but good leading lights once you can see into the hole. Rafted up against our old friends “Trilogy” who we had initially rafted up on in Dartmouth 4 days ago.



Left early (0700) the next morning for Newtown. We had initially started this trip from Newtown so we felt it was only right to finish there. We passed a peaceful night on a mooring listening to the curlews and geese before the final short leg back to Southampton. We have been away 2 months almost to the day and in that time have covered some 975 nautical miles. We have had a variety of weather; however, apart from the rain crossing the channel and the fog in Cherbourg at the start of our voyage plus being port bound in St Helier for several days, in the main the weather in Southern Brittany was very good. We also got stuck in L'Aberwrac'h for several days and took a beating at Dartmouth. The lesson seems to be that the further south the better. From the Vilaine River to Brest we sailed with full sail, usually in swimming costumes in winds of F2-3 Beaufort. North of Brest the weather was frequently bad with rain fog and strong winds. Anyway we made it, Micawber looked after us, we made some new friends and learned something about the interior of Brittany on the canal section of the trip.

Fig. 14 Micawber back in Newtown Creek

I have many notes and useful tips covering the canal section of this trip for anyone contemplating a similar voyage, so feel free to contact us via “navigation@effective-solutions.co.uk” if you want more information.

Graham and Susan Collins.