

TRIP TO BALTIC SEA BY PHIL BETTS ON TAINUI 2018

The idea was to sail back to the Baltic Sea, I say sail back because this will be my second trip there. In 2016 I left Lowestoft at the end of May for the trip. The sail east was a hard one and it took its toll on me and the boat. After leaving the Kiel Hafen I discovered a water leak into the boat through the hull/deck joint. This had the possibility of getting serious very quickly so the decision was taken to limp home.

It's now time to do it all again this time hoping to do some proper sailing out there.

Well this trip started with a rather rough crossing from Lowestoft to IJmuiden N 20/30knots reefed down and with the Hydro vane steering the boat. There is no way a tiller pilot could possibly cope with 2 metre seas coming at you from the beam. The only problem with sailing with the Hydro vane is it's a bit like riding a unicycle in such it's all about balance, you have to set the boat up just so if you don't the Hydro vane won't play ball. As I closed in on the Dutch coast the sea state further deteriorated and I decided to reduce sail a little more. This will slow the boat down a bit giving it a chance to go over the sea rather than through it. This all happened in the ITZ. Now remember what I said about balance - as I rolled off some headsail Hydro vane threw all her toys out of the pram and the boat changed course by enough to get the attention of a small ship which was not far away. This vessel immediately DSC called me and asked what my intentions were. I felt like saying I would let him know when I had worked it out myself. Apart from this the 104 miles sailed that day passed without any problems. On arriving at Seaport I immediately filled with diesel, this went into cans I had brought

then 2 hours sleep. I filled in the Schengen form and left for the sea lock. I tied up once through and slept for the rest of the night. Only next day did I actually look at the diesel receipt and this was a bit of a shock for I was filling with diesel at Lowestoft for 50p per litre and at Seaport it's 155 per litre.

On the 11th May I move off up the North Sea canal to Amsterdam and a place called Aeolus and stayed there for the 12th as well. Aeolus is a club much the same as L.C.C. and its location is perfect for Amsterdam. Most British sailors seem to go into Six haven, this used to be a nice place if very busy but now I don't like it as it's transformed into a Marina from its Club origins.

In all the years I have been going to Aeolus I have never seen another British boat in there and long may that continue.

On the 13th for some mad unknown reason I decided to leave my nice cosy mooring and sail to Enkhuizen in the wind and rain. It is possible to anchor in the outer harbour at Compagnieshaven either on NW or NE side in the soft mud. The rain had stopped by then and the sun did put in a brief appearance to make it all worthwhile. The wind did not abate and howled through the rigging of the yachts in the Marina just some 200 metres away but I was tucked in under the tree line with hardly a breath over the decks.

On the 14th the destination was Kornwerderzand Sluice (lock). The sun was shining and the wind was blowing a steady 15/18 knots, the only slightly annoying thing was it was going to be a beat to wind all the way. If there is one thing I do know about the Dutch and that is they do like a lay-in, so I got an early start 0800hrs and I was the only boat out on the Ijsselmeer. Now because it was a beat 2 hours later I could still see Enkhuizen in the distance 10 miles away. By 1030hrs a steady stream of yachts were leaving the Marina looking

like a swarm of angry wasps. The reason they can have such a lay-in is because they sail such fast boats and I was very glad that I was not in a race for I think it would be like doing a powerboat race in a Pedalo. I clocked up 41 miles with all my tacking, if I had motored all the way to wind instead of sailing it would have been 20 miles. There is a very nice anchorage just beside the Lock if the wind has any N in it and that is where I stopped.

On the 15th May I decided to move on to Harlingen, the other side of the Kornwerderzand Sluice is tidal so I had to look up the tides to make sure that I had enough depth of water and it was flowing the right way for me. I had to motor all the way to Harlingen, I don't like the tidal harbour here much preferring to lock into the top of the canal. On exiting the lock canal side turn hard to starboard and down a narrow dyke to HWSV. This is a little gem of a place much like Aeolus in Amsterdam a small club in a quiet location just outside the town centre. Stayed here until the 19th. With no sign of the easterly wind changing direction and wanting to make a move I reluctantly entered the canal with the aim to motor to Delfzijl instead of sailing round the islands of the North Dutch coast. As strange as it might sound the offshore route is a lot safer than going down the canal and a lot quicker to.

I have done this trip before and for one person it is not that easy. For a start there's something like 57 bridges and 3 locks to negotiate and I can say with confidence that at the end of the canal it feels like 157 bridges. On the positive side it's in the main 110miles of very pretty and picturesque trip with lots of very nice places to stop and the weather was warm and sunny too.

This was a tour of Northern Holland finishing at Delfzijl on the 24th (5 days). I don't think it's possible to do this any quicker even on a fast yacht. The speed of the boats on canal is about 5knots but when you consider all the waiting around you have at the bridges and locks the overall speed is considerably less. A good example of this is that it had taken me 3 hours to do 1 mile through the centre of

Groningen where there are 15 bridges to pass.

On arriving in Delfzijl I passed the sea lock and made my way to the Yacht Club in the west end of the harbour. Z.V.Neptunus a great place to stop, well actually the only place to stop. On the 25th May the weather forecast was not good for the German Bite so I stayed another day. Then on the 26th there was a glimmer of hope for a sail to Nordeney so I set off in light winds and warm sun at 0930hrs. By the time I had sailed down the EMS river to the island of Borkum I was reefed down in 20/25knots of wind out of the, yes you guessed it, it was the blessed East. As the tide was flowing east this was going to make the sea rather lumpy, that in itself was not my main concern, the problem is the approach to Nordeney is very shallow and must be approached in settled conditions so mission abandoned and I ran into Borkum. I have been to Borkum twice before and it was as I remembered it horrid. The minute after I arrived I was desperate to leave. Now don't get me wrong the town is lovely and the beaches are golden sand with extra large dunes it even has its own steam train which runs from the ferry port to the town. But the harbour now - that's another thing. It reminds me of an old abandoned Russian military base. The only thing moving apart from the few unfortunate yachts are the wind farm boats - I say boats well here they are more like ships (small car ferry size). All these wind farm skippers seem to have the same mind set - its either stop or flat out and this can be a bit intimidating when you unexpectedly come across one at the harbour entrances and he is looking down on you from the wheelhouse that's higher than the top of the mast.

I had to endure Borkums harbour for 2 nights and then I had a chance to go with a small weather window which would allow me to get to Nordeney so I left at 0400hrs on the 28th taking the last of the ebb tide out of the Ems. There were three other boats due to leave for Nordeney that morning, two of these suffered alarm clock failure and never showed up. The other one was a very nice brand new Hallberg Rassy 34 and they left one hour after me and arrived

one hour before me. This was quite impressive especially when you consider a rather unpleasant discovery they had enroute. I was watching the Rassy chasing me down on AIS, I had a head start on him and he steadily closed this to one mile and then he stopped and briefly turned around, very puzzling I thought. Then the ch16 lit up between the Rassy and Liegeplatz seenotkreuzer (we say lifeboat), there was obviously a problem on board this yacht. He didn't call me so I continued with my approach to Nordeney, on arriving at the Marina I actually berthed next to his boat. On the way back from paying the HM for the berth I asked my neighbour what the problem was. He had discovered a body in the sea and he stayed close to it until the lifeboat got there which didn't take long as its stationed at Nordeney. I very quickly changed the subject as he didn't want to discuss it. So I was very impressed to hear that this magnificent boat of his was making 5 knots through the water with 15 knots over the deck at a remarkable 28/30 to wind. Goodness knows what it would do with 20 knots on the beam.

The 29th was a day in Nordeney, another day of easterly 5/6 but the forecast for the next few days were a lot better than I had seen for weeks so I went for a wander around town. This is a very pretty and well maintained place for the wealthy German holiday makers. The beaches are stunning with miles of golden sand and clean blue sea a world away from that brown sludge that we sail in up and down the east coast of England but there were no swimmers that I could see. Perhaps it's a bit on the cold side this time of the year.

The yacht moorings at Nordeney are the only ones that I have been in that actually has a fire alarm fitted. This looks like the same system that you would see in a public building - brake glass and push button type and no there wasn't a sprinkler system so when you brake the glass I'm not sure what happens next.

I bumped into the Dutch couple that had the alarm malfunction at Borkum and he had missed the last of the ebb out of the Ems so he had to push the first of the flood, this took him 4 hours just to get

out then he had to negotiate the Nordeney bar at LW. This they did without touching the bottom but unfortunately ran aground trying to get into marina berths.

On the 30th May I left Nordeney 3 hours after LW and had no problem with depth with a destination of Helgoland. This is a very simple sail up the coast or so I thought. After 4 hours into the run to Helgoland I had company in the form of a large German Coast Watch ship. He shadowed me for about 1 hour then called me on ch16 and told me that he will be launching a rib off the side of the ship with a boarding team. 10 minutes later two of them jumped on board. I don't know what they were expecting but they were carrying enough weapons to fight off a small army. It became apparent very quickly that they were not happy with the way I sailed through an anchorage. Lucky for me I got off with a warning so now I have to go around all the anchorages and all the damn windfarms.

Helgoland is a duty free port so if you are a chain smoking alcoholic sailor this is the place for you. Apart from that I don't know much about this place as I have never gone any further than the harbour office to pay my fee. I don't think I am missing much.

To get into the Elbe your timing with the tides have to be good and Helgoland is a very good place to sail from to do that. This is the only reason that I, along with several others, are here. Mooring is always a problem here and rafting up is nearly always necessary and that is what I had to do so I came alongside a very nice looking 45foot yacht with a very fat German sitting, well I should say roasting, in the cockpit for it was a very hot day with very little wind. I knew straight away he wasn't the owner of the boat for he made no effort whatsoever to help me moor alongside him. But he did shout down the companionway that I was coming on and two more fat Germans slowly made their way on deck. They didn't speak any English but they knew what to do and took my lines. Now I don't speak any German at all and had always considered it to be as useful as an aborigine learning Welsh. So I resorted to some sort of

improvised sign language and it worked for about 5 seconds then they just went back to what they were doing which was not a lot. It became apparent that they had been to the duty free and were now in the process of consuming it. I think this is why he didn't get up to help me because he was unable to stand and the other two were not far behind.

I very quickly realised I needed to get out of the sun as it was very hot and after a couple of hours I thought I had better go and pay for my berth. This involved a long walk all the way round the harbour to the office. Of course I had to walk across the German boat to get ashore but my luck was in for the three unconscious walruses were slowly cooking on gas mark 6 in the cockpit.

On the way back from the harbour office I thought I would check out the showers to see if they require a 50pence as this is quite common in the Netherlands but to my amazement the showers cost 4 Euros, lucky for me I have showers on board the boat that are free.

Next day off to the Elbe, 31st May. Left at 0645hrs for the Elbe, this was a spring tide for this river and it flows very quick on the neap tide so today it should have been a fast passage to Brunsbuttel. Even at 9.5 knots it seems a long way, this is because it is so very busy and you cannot relax for a moment. I had decided to stop at Cuxhaven for diesel, this is the first possible overnight berthing on the Elbe and the tide by now was running at full flood with 4.5knots across the entrance to the marina. I was treated to a demonstration on how not to enter. This was an incredible thing to see only because this was a Dutch yacht and I have until that point never seen a Dutch skipper come anywhere near making a mistake. Whilst he pushed back against the tide I shot in to the fuel berth and to add insult to injury when he did eventually get in he had to wait while I filled with diesel first. I had to be quick for I still had to get up to Brunsbuttel and my concern was losing the push from the flood tide. If I lost this push and it had turned to ebb against me the result

would have been a spectacular cockup. I needn't have worried, I got there in plenty of time and lucky for me straight into the lock as the gates shut behind me. With no delays I pushed up the canal to the first free mooring spot.

Friday 1st June was a lazy day for me. I left late morning and motored in the extreme heat to Rendsburg. With my total dislike of all marinas I try to seek out a boatyard to anchor if possible. Last time I was here I found a place called Eider Marina - this is a few moorings at the bottom of someone's garden and 11 euros per night, I couldn't complain.

The 2nd June I stayed again but it was very hot and with little to no wind I had little to do. I decided to go shopping at the supermarket and when I came back the Dutch couple with the malfunctioning alarm clock had turned up.

I left at 0700hrs on the 3rd June for Holtenu, this is the exit part of the Kiel canal and this is where you have to pay for the use of the canal. When I was here 2 years ago they had suspended the fees while they were installing a new payment system. I was very pleased to see a floating pontoon that had automatic payment machine on it. All you had to do was put your Mastercard in and pay E18. After a short wait the lock opened and we, that's me and 3 other yachts, were off and into this massive ships lock. We moored up to the floating pontoons switched off the engines and waited. After 15 minutes or so along came what I can only describe as motorboat summer crews which was about 40 motorboats of all shapes and sizes. The relative peace and quiet was shattered by the sound of revving engines and buzzing bow thrusters and a lot of shouting in a variety of languages as they moored up. Everything is big about these locks after all they are for ships. Apart from the vertical movement which was so small it was not possible for me to know whether I had gone up or down, when the gate opened I was pretty smart on leaving before all the chaos started again.

On leaving Holtenau I motored up the Kiel fjord and to my delight there was a breeze and it was from the direction that would work for me so I set sail, the only question was is where to. I decided on Bagenkop arriving 1800hrs after a very pleasant sail. The yacht harbour here is quite small and it was nearly full but I spotted an empty berth and lined up the boat for it. Now this was going to be a bit tight between the posts but I was confident that it will go in. Well I was half right because it went halfway in or just about and then stopped with a squeak as the boat nipped up on these two great posts. It was at that point I realised the whole harbour was now watching me make a fool of myself. This is the reason the thing was empty, nobody had come in sailing a canoe, but in my defence I was only a couple of inches out but this in itself was now a problem for me. Because the boat had jammed in at almost full beam of the hull it wedged it very tight indeed. Two things went through my mind at that point, the first was a (beam me up Scotty moment!) secondly I really did not want to be there. Then looking on the positive side of things I didn't need to mess around with mooring ropes and as I was only half in I expected to pay for half the berth. I did free the boat and berth in the normal manner without further entertainment to a harbour full of Germans.

Monday 4th June with very good weather forecast I decided on Gedser 53 miles, this would be a 0730hrs start. Now the Germans are a bit like the Dutch in the respect that they do like a lay-in, after my little performance the previous day I thought I would slip out of the berth without waking anyone either side of me. Not a chance, as soon as the engine went on they were out like a shot to defend their boats. This is an advantage of sailing alone, everybody wants to help you. I think it's more self preservation than anything else.

This leg was a bit of a complicated one. After exiting the harbour I had to first dodge all the fishing pot markers then clear the shallows of the south of the island, cross four shipping lanes, past a firing exercise area and pass two wind farms. Then there was the

challenge of getting into the marina at Gedser which is up a narrow dredged channel. My luck was in on arriving at Gedser, another boat was lining up to enter so I just needed to follow him. We both then had to moor up and I was not going to mess it up this time. I should say at this point that all the berths were lying at 90 degrees to the wind which was a good 20 knots. This was a difficult manoeuvre for a crewed yacht and it was going to be a bit of a challenge but I need not have worried because this time all the attention of everyone was on the other yacht which was making a humongous cockup of it. He had not a clue how to do this and to think I followed him up the channel thinking he knew what he was doing. I can honestly say that 53 miles was more tiring than crossing the North Sea at 100 miles. I think tomorrow is a day off.

5th June, I didn't do very much at all. It's a good job because there is nothing to do here and nothing to see which is a bit of a surprise for on the approach the previous day there appeared to be a very regular ferry service to and from here and there is a rail station here. On my walk around the place I must have seen only a dozen people a bit puzzling and I wonder is the ferry is empty. But on the plus side very quiet and perfect for a day off.

6th June a sail over to Klintholm. Exiting the harbour was a bit of a bash straight into 20 knots and one and a half metre of short steep sea both on the noses, this had to be done to get clear of the shallows. Then after clearing them to port it was a simple job of just pointing the boat to Klintholm and putting up some sail.

The Hydro vane had been out of favour since its little tantrum in the North Sea but I thought it was time to let it out to play, and after setting it up it behaved perfectly and after 25 miles I was 1 mile off course. Very pleasing, I might use it tomorrow.

On the 7th June the weather was perfect for a sail to Ystad (Sweden) 53 miles. The whole day was spent with the wind at 90 deg.

At 15 knots and the Hydro vane sailed me all the way there. After berthing the boat in a berth with fingers this time, what a luxury that is, I went to pay for the night as with a lot of these places it's all automated. The cost is about £20 per night but you have to buy a tally card as well if you want access to the facilities. This includes electricity, the loos, showers and even the bins so I had to buy one of these which brought the cost up to £35. I was determined to get my money's worth so I decided to go for a shower. The showers and loos are all together in one building and I was quite shocked to find these in a very poor and quite frankly disgusting condition. I had paid extra to use them but there was no way I was going to so I showered on board Tainui again.

On the 8th June I was one month into a planned two month trip and so with much thought I decided that I better think of a return trip. The original plan was to go up the east coast of Sweden and this would have been possible if not for the delay of entering the Elbe. This time I would have to be content with the south coast. I spent the rest of the day looking around town, it reminded me a bit of Lowestoft. There were two surprises, the food is very expensive but thanks to Lucy who stocked the boat for 2 months I didn't need much. And very pleasantly surprised to find a chandlery which was cheap.

On the 9th June I started the sail back. I wanted to meet up with David and Sheila on Delphyn. Before leaving the Baltic Sea they were going to be in Klintholm on the 9th so that is where I would go. I had to motor sail as the wind was very light. I had a lovely evening with them and was very sad to leave them on the 10th as I had to make the most of the light winds from the east. I sailed to Gedser from this port and planned to go south and take a slightly different route out.

The 11th was the start of a significant change in the weather. S and SW and a big drop in temperature, this was bad news for me. It was

windy to sail and just getting the boat out of the berth was going to be a challenge so I decided to stay put.

The 12th June was only slightly better. This was going to be a 35 mile bash nothing elegant about this little sail. I knew that I had to motor sail for this was the quickest way to get to Fehmarn. I couldn't afford to hang about because the weather was due further deterioration. If you think the North Sea is short and steep try the Baltic. I motor sailed to wind for 6 hours and had more water over the top of the boat than a submarine! After 6 hours of that I was just about ready to take up golf as a hobby.

On the 13th and still recovering from the 6 hours slog the previous day the weather was actually worse so another day in harbour. Lucky for me Fehmarn has very good wi-fi so I got onto Google to try and find some golf clubs. What a shock that was and I thought sailing was expensive. Anyway there's way too much walking in that game for me. Fehmarn is a holiday island and has a hell of a lot of flats, most were empty from what I could see. I was a bit early in the season just as well because the whole place was a bit of a building site. The harbour master here didn't have a very good grasp of English and in the confusion of the exchange I actually got 2 nights for the price of 1. Another good reason not to learn German.

The biggest danger here was making sure you weren't run over by a digger driver on his mobile phone. It became obvious to me they drive their diggers like their boats - it's either flat out or stop. I am beginning to wonder if there is a word for slow in German. This place is well worth a visit and I did like the place and when all the work is done it will be even better. On my walk around the harbour I was very lucky to bump into the owners of the only other boat that sailed from Gedser the day before. This boat was a 10 metre racing yacht and its performance up wind was breath-taking. It was tacking upwind faster than I could motor it.

On the 14th with a rubbish forecast of SW, 5 possibly 6 knots, I decided to sail over to Heiligenhafen as the crow flies it's 8 miles but I had time to tack the boat upwind. This was not as easy as it sounds as I had to go up a narrow channel and under a 20metre high bridge. I was very fortunate that I could just make the channel without having to tack.

This bridge was the link between the mainland and the island of Fehmarn. The harbour and marina at Heiligenhafen must be getting on for the same size seaport in Holland, it's very big. Of all the empty berths in this marina unknown to me I had selected to go onto a mooring next to a sailing school. I was treated to an afternoon of entertainment. Over the next 4 hours a 40foot yacht was continuously coming and going, this was an education for me too. It's a good job that when I arrived this yacht was not in its berth for the instructor I think would not have approved of my berthing a 10metre boat on my own. As it takes a minimum of Five Germans (apparently) to do this. Quite frankly five Germans is not enough.

The method they were being taught was the most bizarre I had ever seen, most probably dreamed up by some retired NASA scientist. Too complicated to explain but if I said that it involved a 320foot of mooring lines, you might start to get the picture, and yes this was all done at the 2 speed settings - that is German brain flat out or stop. I did eventually get bored with watching this circus act so I went for a walk around town. The old fishing harbour is lovely but without a doubt the heart of the place is this massive marina which caters for all things boaty from 70foot motor yachts to canoes.

The 15th June I left early for Labeo, this is only 35 miles and the weather forecast was for very little wind from the west so a day on engine again, to my surprise the sea state was very poor. My boat can make 6 knots on flat water with no wind against it. Well there was no wind but this short steep chop was taking 2 knots off me. I pressed on hoping things might improve and slowly they did ending

the run to Labeo at 5.5knots. Unfortunately I needed diesel again, the fuel berth is in the old harbour here so I decided to sort that out first and then go to the marina for a berth. After filling the tank I was very lucky to take the only free berth in the old harbour, this is much nicer than the marina berths. I have been here before and Labeo is another one of those very nice German towns and from the harbour only a short walk to the U boat memorial. This is a very impressive place and even has a restored U boat you can walk through. It's not in the water but on the beach in front of the memorial for all to see as you sail into the Kieler fjord.

On the 16th June I re-entered the canal, unfortunately for me the weather forecast for the next 7 days was westerly's. This is really annoying as I waited 2 weeks to get into the Elbe now I'm going to have to wait to get out so I have been very unlucky with the wind direction. So I made my next stop Rendsburg back onto Eider marina, a perfect place to wait for a few days and without a doubt one of the nicer places I have so far been in.

17th June. I have now been away for 39 days and only seen 2 other British boats and one of them was from our club. The other thing that's missing is the UK Red Ensign from all the yacht club marinas and harbours. This I can only put down to (Brexit), and it was actually suggested to me by a German couple that this is why I was here because next year I will not be able to. I decided because of the bad forecast to stay another night.

18th June. I moved to the lock at Brunsbuttel arriving a bit early for the ebb tide down the Elbe to Cuxhaven. There was only one other boat in the lock, it was a NIAD 49. On exiting the lock we both motored out into 2 knots of tide against us and very heavy drizzle. This was going to be a bit of a slow wet trip down the Elbe. In an effort to get out of the worst of the tide I moved up into the shallows on the north side, this worked quite well and I was able to make good time. I spent the next 7 days in Cuxhaven waiting for the

weather to improve and I was very confident it would because it wasn't going to get much worse. For 3 of the 7 days the boat was being pushed over by the wind to such a degree that the gunnels on the lee side were actually pushed down level with the pontoon fingers. This was making the fenders next to useless.

26th June was the day of my escape from Cuxhaven, after 7 days the place was getting a bit of a bore. The wind forecast was very good for the 26th but the tides gave only 2 options for departure. Leave midnight or 0300hrs and I decided 0300hrs as I felt it was safer with only 1 hour of darkness to contend with. However the later departure meant I would not get to Nordeney at HW for the bar crossing.

Once clear of the Elbe approach which is 20 miles the sea started to settle down to 2 metres at 90 degrees to my course. This wave height could make Nordeney bar very dangerous at LW and this meant if I couldn't make good time I would have to stay at sea and go on to Borkum. After giving it some thought and speaking by phone to Nordeney HM I decided to give it a go if I was there before half tide. I actually made very good time and arrived only two and a half hours after HW.

27th and the destination was Borkum. This meant leaving at HW Nordeney to be able to safely take the western channel which is a bit shallower than the eastern channel which I used on the previous day. Left at 1200hrs the wind speed and direction was perfect and I sailed all the way to Borkum harbour and as I suspected because of the late arrival all the moorings were occupied so I ended up alongside a Dutch yacht. This proved very useful for my next destination was going to be Lauwersmeer. This is a place I have not been before but I had heard a lot of horror stories about. Just reading the Pilot notes in Reeds was a bit worrying. I was lucky that the yacht I was alongside was based in Lauwersmeer. They were very helpful with advice and I followed it to the letter and the passage

was done with no problem.

On arriving at Lauwersmeer I needed to pass a lock and this was done with typical Dutch efficiency and exiting the lock I anchored at the first opportunity for lunch.

The 28th June had been another very early start. In the end I decided to stay on the berth for the night as it was such a nice spot. This trip from Borkum to Lauwersmeer is a very good example of remembering to expect the unexpected for on planning this leg it was going to be easy to leave the Ems on the inshore route and it might be a bit of a challenge at the Lauwersmeer. What actually happened was I very nearly ran aground just off Borkum as the charted depth was incorrect out by 2m. A yacht that followed me out of Borkum ran aground over this very shallow spot and the 10 miles of Piloting around the back of Schiermonnikoog and into Lauwersmeer was very simple.

The 29th had a forecast of N3/4 knots with a sea state of moderate, this I didn't fancy for it had the potential for a very uncomfortable trip to Vlieland so I took the easy option and went over the Lauwersmeer into the Dokkumer which is essentially a river, at this point I re-joined my outbound route. Dokkum is well worth a visit, it reeks of all things Dutch unlike south of Sweden which just reeks of rotting seaweed.

30th June I moved up the canal to Leeuwarden, just as I arrived here all the bridge operators stopped for lunch so I thought it was a good idea for me to do the same and have a quick walk around town. By mid afternoon I started to think about finding an overnight stop so I moored on the canal side in what I thought was a nice spot just outside Leeuwarden but after 2 hours two small speedboats turned up with an evening of water-skiing planned.

This after all was not such a good spot. There was only one thing for

it and I moved to try and find a better place. Nearly all the bridges have small waiting spots either side of them, this was now my best chance of a safe spot for the night. My luck was in as I passed the next bridge just before it was due to stop for the night and then moored up on its waiting berth for a perfect spot and this time it stayed that way.

On the 1st July the destination was back to the yacht club at Harlingen. Very conscious that the sailing season was now well on the way and it was warm and sunny if very windy that this might be a problem getting a berth if I arrived too late in the day. I only had 4 bridges now to pass to get there so as soon as they became operational I was off. Got there at 1100hrs, this was perfect timing for HW Harlingen was 1200noon and all the boats that were going to leave needed to be out by then. The HM recognised my boat and directed me to a berth. When I went to pay for the night we had quite a lengthy chat about my trip as he was very interested.

The 2nd July and I stayed put, had to do a little shopping and on the way back to the boat I spotted a familiar looking boat in the harbour. It was the Russian Yacht from St. Petersburg that was waiting in Cuxhaven along with me and many others. You would be forgiven for thinking that those 7 days waiting in Cuxhaven were boring but it was not the case at all for everyone else was doing the same and we all became friends. All different nationalities, quite amazing, 2 Russian yachts, 1 Swedish, 1 Danish, 2 Norwegian, 2 German, 1 American and 1 other English boat. There was 1 French yacht but I didn't speak to him, you've got to draw the line somewhere. Three of this small group had been in collision with rocks in the time they were in the Baltic and one of the German boats was taking in water. I offered to look at this and give my opinion of the extent of the damage. This offer was accepted and as we discussed it further he did admit that he had hit the rocks on two other separate occasions.

The Americans were husband and wife that were living aboard their

40foot yacht. The wife had sailed extensively, the husband not. They had bought the boat from an Englishman in Finland and were on their way to Spain. He wanted my advice about sailing the North Sea. This man was very nervous about what he called a shallow sea, I can only put this down to the fear of the unknown. This is the position I was in with Lauwersmeer approach from sea.

On the 3rd July I moved across the Waddenzee to the Ijsselmeer. The summer season was now well on the way and I knew the Kornwerderzand lock would be very busy just after HW Harlingen. I left 2 hours before HW hoping this would beat the rush. 2 years ago when I came through here it was total chaos and I came very close to being damaged by a crazy skipper who did not know the length of his boat or perhaps he forgot that he had a bowsprit. This plan worked well for as I entered the approach to the lock in the distance behind me some 5 miles away yachts were streaming out of Harlingen at slack water. I was in the lock with only 12 other boats. On my outbound trip I passed through here on the 15th May and there was only 1 boat in this lock, me. On exiting the lock I went over to the anchorage for the night.

4th July I motored over to Hindeloopen to meet Terry. Like me he was a single handed sailor and it was very nice to see him and have a chat. Hindeloopen is a very nice village, too nice not to stay the night. I wasn't the only one thinking of going to Hindeloopen for by 1700hrs the place was jammed full of all sorts of boats and there was no way I was going to get out even if I wanted to. It was time to leave The Netherlands for it's getting too busy for me.

On the 5th the wind was very light and both Terry and myself left at the earliest opportunity, he went to Makkon and I sailed/drifted down to Durgardam which is 40 miles and took an amazing 12 hours arriving just before dark at the anchorage.

The 6th I left early for Aeolus in Amsterdam. You need to be here no later than 1200hrs for the best chance for a mooring. I stayed the night and moved off for Seaport on the 7th. By leaving Aeolus after lunch and arriving in Seaport at 1600hrs with intention of sailing for Lowestoft at 0300hrs my stay here was short enough not to incur any mooring fees.

On the 8th left at 0230hrs with a forecast of N WE 4/5 knots. Perfect I thought but what actually happened was no wind and by 1000hrs thick fog and to my horror my new Radar was not going to work for me. So I had to rely on the AIS alone.

In recent years the development of AIS on ships and yachts has made moving in poor visibility much safer and all boats should have at least an AIS receiver but if they can afford a transceiver all the better. I have been told on more than one occasion by skippers that they don't need AIS on their boat but this to me is like saying they don't need a windscreen on their car. True you can drive a car without a windscreen but it's hard work and very uncomfortable and sooner or later a pheasant is going to take your head off.

The fog did clear away and the wind arrived after 10 hours of motoring so it ended up being a very nice finish to the trip. The North Sea crossing had taken 18 hours, this is about right for 104 miles and I was very pleased to be back on my mooring before dark.

When I did this trip 2 years ago I had the wind against me for most of the way out and unbelievably most of the way back. I have come to the conclusion after speaking to the locals who all say the same thing - this trip in this time frame is a bad idea. Most people sail out from the UK in the middle of summer and back the following spring, this will give you SW on the way out and NE on the way back. This means either leaving the boat in the Baltic or winter sailing but neither of these options appeal to me.

Total distance travelled		1,350 miles
Average speed		4.8 knots
Maximum speed (entering Elbe with full spring tide)		14.8 knots
Diesel used	350 litres	Euros 528.20
Mooring fees (33 days average E16.87)		Euros 557.
Food		Euros 300
Free moorings	26 days	

Problems and Maintenance

Had to change the impeller in the pump as it threw a blade.

Had to do an oil change on the engine.

Replaced 2 mooring lines as they chafed through in Cuxhaven.

Changed the radar which stopped working when I most needed it but as it was almost new this was done under warranty.