

# The Irish summer cruise in company 2023

By Geoff Hilditch - Yacht Aslan & Cruising Captain RWYC

When I came up with the original plans A, B & C for the 2023 club summer cruise I have to admit I was more than a little sceptical that we'd be blessed with suitable weather to allow for a cruise down as far as the Fastnet Rock and back within the 2-4 week time frame that most of those interested in coming along had to work to, given that once past Carnsore Point the SE facing coast of Eire down to Cape Clear Island has a reputation for being "hard work" in prevailing SW'ly winds. As departure day, for most boats, 27<sup>th</sup> May approached I wondered how much longer the NE'lies that had been blowing for the previous fortnight would last.

Pyewacket and Be Traist left on Friday the 26<sup>th</sup> and spent the night at Porth Dinllaen before crossing over to Arklow on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Liquid Asset left Conwy on Saturday morning and spent the night at Holyhead before an early start over to Arklow on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Crwydr had left Caernarfon 10 days or so earlier and cruised to the IOM and Strangford Lough before heading South to Arklow via Carlingford and Dun Laoghaire.

Okavango, Toucan, Hortus & Aslan left Caernarfon mid afternoon on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May and spent the night at anchor off Pen Y Parc. By the time that Toucan, Okavango and Aslan set off at 0530 on Sunday morning Hortus was already a dot on the horizon having had a real "crack of dawn" start. The wind was a little fluky for the first half hour or so but soon filled in to a steady 15-18kn from the NE so I dropped Aslan's main and continued for the rest of the way to Arklow under her new Genoa, only bent-on the day we left Caernarfon. Given the very small neap tides the seas were surprisingly lumpy on the starboard quarter making for quite an uncomfortable crossing and making it hard for Aslan's Sea Feather wind vane to steer a straight course. As we all approached the N Arklow buoy the wind was gusting up to occasionally 25kn making for quite a confused sea state and an exciting approach to Arklow, even more so when re-reading the pilot book and its warning to avoid there in strong Easterly weather! There were also quite a few poorly marked pots down that final few miles inside the Arklow bank. Despite the white water on either breakwater and the sea turning from blue to muddy brown the narrow entrance was safely negotiated, and I was soon rafted up on the long pontoon near the marina to starboard close by to the other 7 RW boats after a

tiring 69.6nm passage taking 13 hours. Apart from me everyone else ate upstairs in the Old House, I joined the others later for the first Guinness of the trip!



Monday 29/5 was a rest day in Arklow.

Our next “leg” was down the coast round Carnsore Point and on to Kilmore Quay, it being important to make sure that you’re round past the Tuskar Rock & Carnsore before the tide turns and starts to flow NE again there (not so easy to get the timing right given that it’s about 38nm down to Rosslare). This meant another early start with all the boats leaving between 0500 & 0545 – the wind was fairly light NE’ly to start with gradually increasing through the day. Given the fairly light wind running with the tide there was still

quite a confused sea on the passage inshore of the Baillies and, once round Carnsore Point, the wind continued to increase as we headed for the short cut across St Patrick’s Bridge near Kilmore Quay. By the time I was approaching the Bridge the tide was running hard North over it and the wind was gusting 23kn kicking up choppy conditions, but all was peace and tranquility once rafted up on the hammerheads in the marina. Crews walked up the road to Kehoe’s pub for a couple of well-earned pints.



Wednesday 30/5 was a rest day in Kilmore Quay with coastal walks, shopping and generally enjoying the continuing lovely warm and sunny weather. In the evening we all ate in the “sit in” part of the fish and chip shop, where the portions were really too big!



Given the continuing Easterly winds and the relatively few options for anchorages they give our next port of call was set as Youghal, about 50nm to the SW where an arrival around HW, 1625 on 1/6, is preferable due to the strong tide on the ebb there. This meant another early start (a pattern developing here!) and all the boats were under way by 0600. I started out with full sail but soon dropped the main and set Aslan's cruising chute and ran downwind in the pleasant 12kn Easterly. Pyewacket & Carpe Diem were flying along under their "hi-tech" coloured sails for a couple of hours. When the gusts increased to 15-18kn I snuffed Aslan's chute and continued under Genoa only romping along with "Sophie" the Sea Feather steering. I arrived at the back of the bunch but just before HW and picked up a mooring. Sophie on Hortus did a grand job in contacting the HM at Youghal when we were on the way and arranging for some boats to pick up visitor moorings and some to raft up on the pontoon. Dingy work from the moorings to the pontoon was not for the faint hearted in the strong tide, but we are used to that on the Straits. We all met ashore for a drink at the very pleasant Quays bar/restaurant where some crews also dined.







Okavango, Toucan, Hortus & Liquid Asset left before 0800 on Friday 2/6 to sail to Crosshaven, the rest of us decided to stay in Youghal for a further day (Crwydr stayed a 3<sup>rd</sup> day) to enjoy the sunshine and catch up on shopping and various jobs on board rounding the day off with a very nice meal on board Carpe Diem.

On Saturday 3/6 Aslan, Carpe Diem, Pyewacket and Be Traist (after a battle with the submerged mooring buoy and their line to it!) left around 0800 for the 35nm or so passage to Kinsale. Sophie had again worked wonders in securing 8 berths for us in Kinsale YC marina. Once out over the quite shallow bar at Youghal a breeze gradually filled in, again from the East, and by the time we were approaching Ballycotton Island engines could be stopped and we continued the rest of the way under sail with 15-18kn of wind more or less astern. Okavango, Toucan & Hortus arrived before the boats coming from Youghal – the 7 boats were all safely in the berths by 1530 and enjoyed a drink or two on the balcony of the KYC in the hot sunshine. Kinsale is quite a trendy and touristy place with seemingly countless bars, restaurants & coffee shops – very pleasant though, if a little pricey!

Liquid Asset sailed from Crosshaven to Baltimore on the 3/6 and then down to and around the Fastnet Rock on Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup> before anchoring for the night in Castletownshend after a beat back up there in a F5 on the nose.

Sunday 4/6 was a rest day for the boats remaining in Kinsale, Hortus left early to sail down to Castletownshend. Later in the day Crwydr and Ocean Hobo arrived at the KYC marina and that evening a number of crews dined in a rather swanky restaurant close by.

Monday 5/6 was a holiday in Ireland which, combined with the great weather, explained why everywhere in Kinsale was so busy. Okavango & Aslan left shortly after 0800 bound for Castletownshend with Be Traist and Crwydr following soon after. The wind was, yet again, quite fresh from the East once we'd passed the Old Head of Kinsale with a lumpy quartering sea. We passed quite close to Liquid Asset off Galley Head – it was definitely easier running under genoa with the wind on the quarter than beating into wind and the waves like she was. Later on we also passed Hortus close to Rabbit Island battling the conditions – she put in to Glandore for a few hours and waited a few hours for the wind to ease before continuing on towards Cork. Toucan stayed a further day in Kinsale before starting her passages back to Caernarfon.



The seas were quite choppy and the entrance to Castletownshend wasn't easy to make out until quite close and until Black Rock was identifiable but, once through, and the sharp turn to starboard was made the inlet opened up and was calm and tranquil. It really is a delightful spot and one of my favourites of the trip. Okavango, Be Traist & Aslan anchored clear of the moorings and the submarine cable opposite the quay and were soon joined by Crwydr and all crews rowed ashore and met for drinks in the garden of Mary Ann's pub & restaurant.



Okavango, Be Traist & Aslan moved on to Baltimore late morning on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June whilst Crwydr decided to stay a second night in Castletownshend. Once again the sky was blue and there was a fresh 15-20kn Easterly blowing once the boats were out of the sheltered inlet past Black Rock. Once again Aslan sailed under just the genoa in close company with Okavango sailing under genoa and mizzen – we took the passage through Stag Sound between Toe Head and the evil looking Stag Rocks. We fairly rattled along with the tide under us and were soon approaching the fairly narrow entrance to Baltimore harbour between Beacon Point, with Lot's Wife beacon on the top of it, and Barrack Point on Sherkin Island. By pure chance a sailor had walked up to the Beacon and took a photo of Aslan sailing through the entrance (Peter from Oyster 46 Nimrod based in Ardrossan later came to see me on the pontoon).

After a bit of “shuffling around of RIB’s the HM/Atlantic Boating Services man (one and the same!) cleared a space for Okavango alongside the pontoon, we’d spoken to him prior to leaving Castletownshend to confirm berths were available, and Aslan rafted up alongside her. The main pontoon is an old concrete barge, like those that used to be moored in the Menai Straits many moons ago, and is close under the harbour wall and orientated West to East with enough water for moderate draft boats to stay afloat and is perfectly sheltered from the 30+ knot Easterlies which were forecast for the next few days. Be Traist anchored and later moved to a mooring closer to the harbour. Pyewacket and Carpe Diem arrived soon after and picked up visitor moorings which are also operated by Atlantic Boating Services. Very soon after this the Baltimore ALB was in action rescuing the

crew of 5 from a local 40' yacht which became entangled with a pot line/fishing gear in the narrow entrance to Baltimore – the yacht was driven onto the rocks on Sherkin Island and was a total loss but, thankfully, all 5 on board were saved (I think the rocks were those in the background to the picture below – if not very close by).







As became a bit of a habit all, or at least most crews, met ashore for drinks outside Bushe's pub enjoying the glorious weather (and Guinness!). Crwydr arrived from Castletownshend on Wednesday 7/7 and rafted up on the other side of the pontoon to join in the fun!



The forecast Easterlies did indeed blow from Wednesday night to Saturday morning making it sometimes a little wet for those on moorings to get ashore, but at least the sun kept shining and the temperature remained in the mid 20's. One boat, a HR352, broke its mooring and went through the moorings and anchorage miraculously avoiding every other boat before being "rescued" by the HM and rafted alongside the pontoon and another dragged its mooring but caused no damage to others. Time was passed with coastal walks, bus rides to Skibbereen and nearby gardens, jobs on board, visits to Bushe's and the Algiers Inn and even some relaxation!

By Saturday morning 10/6 the wind was finally moderating but had been replaced by mist, fog and drizzle. Okavango & Aslan were starting to suffer from "harbour fever" and were keen to press on later that day but were well and truly hemmed in by 3 big charter yachts, one of which a block of flats like catamaran. We were assured by the HM that these would be moving at lunchtime but, as seems to be the Irish way, this turned in to more like 3pm! By then the wind had dropped to very little but the fog was still around with visibility going from ½ a mile to 200 yards a few minutes later – as we left the pontoon at 1500 heading for the Sound (the narrow Northern channel out of Baltimore Harbour between Spanish & Sherkin Islands) and bound for North Harbour on Cape Clear Island visibility closed down to about 200 yards and stayed like that all the way to North Harbour on the twisting route past The Mealbeg Rock, Two Women's Rocks, the various rocks off the west side of Sherkin Island and outside the Bullig Reef off Cape Clear Island. The pilot book says that the entrance to North Harbour is difficult to make out until very close – well it certainly was today! As it happens the ferry that runs between N Harbour and Baltimore came out as we were a few hundred yards away. If it hadn't been for modern nav aids I'm sure we would not have attempted this passage for the first time in such poor visibility. I'd asked the skipper of the ferry that morning whether there was any space in North Harbour and he'd said "yes, plenty, don't worry" – well, I'm glad he didn't say it was full as the tiny basin where the 2 pontoons are looked pretty full to me with very little space for turning as I rafted up 4<sup>th</sup> out alongside Okavango! There were a total of 8 visiting boats + 3 small local angling type boats in there. The pontoons have water and electric and are free of charge and the harbour is a few minutes stroll up the hill past a small shop cum bistro (with toilets & shower behind it) to a couple of pubs. A gem of a place and I'm sorry we were only staying 1 night as I'm told there are some lovely walks on the island. Rob and I walked up to Ciaran Danny Mikes pub at the top of



the lane and overlooking South Harbour for a couple of pints of Guinness before eating back in Okavango's cockpit.



Pyewacket, Carpe Diem, Be Traist and Crwydr stayed in Baltimore on Saturday with the plan to sail to Crookhaven on Sunday.

Okavango & Aslan's plan was to leave North Harbour on Sunday 11/6 and sail round the Fastnet Rock by rounding the Southern end of Cape Clear Island and then crossing the 4 miles or so over to the Fastnet and then carry on back to Castletownshend. We left North Harbour at about 0800, conditions were still pretty murky as we motor sailed down the coast but there was little wind or swell so we guessed suitable for approaching the Rock. Visibility was poor and nothing was visible until we were about a mile off when the lower part of the Rock could be seen but not the lighthouse! As we approached at about 0930 the gloom started to lift and we motor-sailed round taking pictures of each others' boats.







Visibility remained poor for the rest of the passage but gradually improved as we approached Castletownshend and, by the time we were at anchor the sun had come out just in time for us to go back up to Mary Ann's to celebrate our Fastnet adventure! Ocean Hobo was also at anchor at Castletownshend.

Pyewacket and Carpe Diem sailed from Crookhaven on Monday 12/6 and rounded the Rock in sunshine before continuing up to Castletownshend where the crews from the 4 remaining boats celebrated Fi & Chris's wedding anniversary with a meal at Mary Anns.



Aslan left Castletownshend at 0830 on Monday 12/6 to start making her way back home, the first leg being, like so many that followed, a motor sailing passage up to the delightful Oyster Haven where I picked up a mooring in the peaceful and isolated Balgooly River arm of the inlet – a lovely spot.

On Tuesday 13/6 I continued to Youghal leaving at 0700, again motor sailing, the wind freshening to a steady 15/16kn from the East from late morning making the final part of the passage from Ballycotton Island to Capel Island (I went through the Sound there) a bit of a slog – I had to keep motoring to reach Youghal before the ebb started running and I picked up a visitor mooring just as the tide was turning. The afternoon was really hot and humid so I forced myself to blow up the dingy and row ashore for a cool Guinness or two in the Quay Bar.

My plan to sail to Dungarvan on the 14/6 was thwarted by the fresh Easterly and nasty little chop still persisting – I set off at 1045 an hour after LW but turned back approaching Ram Head as the first 6.3nm had taken me over 2 hours to complete and I'd have definitely not reached Dungarvan before the tide had gone out at that rate! The sail back to Youghal was quite pleasant by comparison and I was back on the same mooring by 1445 with the last of the flood and again blew up the dingy to go ashore and do some shopping followed by some liquid refreshment, this time in the Moby Dick pub. Pyewacket arrived on the pontoon at Youghal about 1830 after a passage from Crosshaven and I was on hand to take her lines, my reward being a lovely chicken curry cooked on passage by Fi. They left at 0600 the next morning bound for Porth Dinllaen and on back to Caernarfon, all under motor I believe.

There was little wind on Thursday morning 15/6 and what there was blowing gently from the SW so I set off again bound for Dungarvan about 21nm away to the NE. As the song says, what a difference a day makes, the seas were flat and I reached the point where I turned back the day before in an hour under genoa with the engine on tick over. I had the Carrickapane reef/rock near the entrance to the twisting channel to Dungarvan abeam by 1500 and was tied up along the Dungarvan SC pontoon in the inner harbour by 1600. This is such a friendly place and right in the centre of a fairly large town with all amenities close to hand and, once in, safe in all conditions. The pontoon dries to about 0.5M at springs so is really only suitable for boats that can take the ground or with shallow draft. I stayed 2 nights with Friday 16/6 being a wet and drizzly day until the evening.



My next passage was back to Kilmore Quay on Saturday 17/6 which meant a 0545 start at HW. As I crossing the outer bar the sky ahead blackened, sheet lightning flashed across the horizon and the wind increased to 20-25kn from the West accompanied by heavy rain and I wondered if it was going to be another “about turn”! I pressed on and after about half an hour the rain stopped & the wind abated and backed round to about 6-8kn from the South as forecast. I sailed under full main & genoa for a while but soon gave up, with speed OG down below 3kn, and carried on for the rest of the passage motor sailing again. It was still quite lumpy, particularly off Hook Head. I arrived at Kilmore Quay and after a bit of shuffling about, managed to get a finger berth for my 3 night stay. More Guinness was consumed in the very friendly Kehoe’s pub before lazily opting for a take away pizza from the fish & chip shop rather than cooking on board.

Sunday was spent doing “not a lot” - I met up with Mike & Lisa from the yacht Swallow from Conwy and we shared a big bag of langoustines kindly given to us by

the HM – what a star – they were delicious and made a lovely stir fry meal after a couple of pints with Mike back in Kehoe's!

Swallow left early on Monday 19/6 for Fishguard but I opted to stay a further day and wait for Okavango to arrive coming from Dunmore East. The weather was still hot & humid making the 3-1/2 mile coastal circular trail a pleasant but slightly sweaty affair! Okavango arrived off the harbour at about 1730 after a lumpy trip from Dunmore East – to make things worse they & a yacht they had sailed with, were kept waiting a good 30 minutes rolling about outside as a trawler had all but blocked the narrow entrance, much to their and the HM's frustration, whilst loading some gear! When eventually they were in and tied up we all strolled up to Kehoe's again for a couple of Guinneses.

My original intention had been to return to Caernarfon via Arklow and either Greystones or Howth and visiting an old customer/friend in Dublin but seeing the forecast for later in the week which looked to be worse on the Irish side and having heard tales of marinas in the Dublin area costing € 50-60 per night I decided to return via Cardigan Bay, crossing over to Fishguard first.

Okavango decided to stay a further day in Kilmore Quay and then return via Arklow so, at 0600 on Tuesday 20/6 I cast off my lines for the last time from the Irish shore and set off for Fishguard. The forecast was for S'ly F3 but little wind was evident as I rattled through the gap of St Patrick's Bridge with the tide under me and set a course to pass close to the Barrels cardinal buoy and the wrong side of the South Rock cardinal approaching the Tuskar Rock. Aslan had 2 knots of fair tide under her and was motor-sailing with full sail set at about 5kn through the water so the apparent wind was zero. The genoa was furled away and I continued past the Tuskar Rock and across the TSS outside that with main and motor. The passage across was uneventful and I was pleased to drop anchor off the lower town harbour at Fishguard at 1930 after a motor-sailing passage of 65.3nm OG. It was a nice peaceful night there in the gentle SW'ly breeze.





My original plan was to dry out alongside the quay in the inner harbour at lower Fishguard on Wednesday 21/6 for a spot of bottom scrubbing but, looking at the forecast as I ate my breakfast and seeing strong S'lies from Friday morning, I decided to change plan and head for Aberystwyth with a short stop at Newquay, as access to Aberystwyth marina was from 2100 that evening & I needed to be past the firing range at Aberporth before 1400 due to live firing close inshore that afternoon (I spoke to range control and Aberystwyth marina before setting off).

There was next to no wind and it was unpleasantly hot and humid as I motored North, stopping at Newquay for 1-1/2 hours to cook an early meal, before continuing to Aberystwyth and arriving on my allocated berth at 2115 after another 43.0nm of motoring! The first pint of a real ale pale coloured bitter for a month in the Ship & Castle 5 minute's walk from the marina tasted good.

I refilled all my empty diesel cans at the Texaco garage which is 7-8 minute's walk from the marina (I carry a folding trolley on board which makes this job easier) had breakfast in Wetherspoons (I know how to live!) did a bit of shopping in Tesco's and settled the marina fees (the guys in the office were friendly and helpful as ever despite all the problems with the Marina Group owner so good luck to them going forward and let's hope whoever emerges as the new owner of the marina and the others in the group are better people to work for!) and was ready to leave at 1145 bound for Porth Dinllaen via Bardsey Sound at or near LW slack (LW Holyhead being 1950 – I usually work on slack being about 30 minutes before HW or LW

Holyhead). Believe it or not there was, yet again, next to no wind so the whole passage was again under motor with a little help from the sails from time to time. The sea was by no means flat considering the days on end of light wind and there were occasional banks of fog on the way over – the highlight of the day was a visit by a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins. Motoring with the main up and the autohelm steering also gave me the chance to mark the reefing lines and halyard for Aslan's new full battened main which was bent on a week or so before I left on the trip. By luck or good planning I passed inshore of Careg Ddu at 1915 and turned the corner up the Lleyrn at 1930 with no foul tide. By the time I was passing Maen Mellt the flood was under us and carried Aslan quickly up towards Porth Dinllaen. I've never seen so many pot buoys as on that 12nm – if I say I saw 100 it wouldn't be an exaggeration, many almost pulled under by the tide, definitely not an area for night passages! I picked up a mooring at 2205 after a passage of 48.1nm just as the light was starting to fade – Okavango was at anchor nearby after a passage over from Arklow mainly in thick fog.

The forecast strong S'lies arrived on Friday 23/6 accompanied with low cloud and drizzle. Okavango and Aslan left at 1030 and had a fast sail (yes, sailing, no engine!) back up to the Bar and on to Caernarfon with the wind frequently gusting 26kn. We were both on our berths by 1315 and later had a celebratory beer in Yr Alex, followed by a take away curry on Okavango & then quiz night in the Club.



Sorry I lost track of some of the other boats after we left Baltimore and Castletownshend but know that Pyewacket, Toucan, Hortus, Liquid Asset & Carpe Diem are all safely back on their home berths whilst Crwydr, Be Traist & Ocean Hobo stayed down in the Bantry & Dingle Bay areas.

What a wonderful trip it was and really great to see that 10 Club boats made it down to Baltimore and enjoyed such a good time together ashore. Aslan logged 609.3nm in total – a bit too much motoring on the way back but at least she sailed most of the way down from Pen Y Parc to Baltimore!

The list of those taking part and crews was, in ascending order of size:

Westerly Griffon 26 Hortus – crew – Sophie & Will  
Sadler 29 Aslan – crew – Geoff  
Westerly Konsort Duo 29 Toucan – crew – Jan & Tom  
Westerly 33 Okavango – crew – Sue & Rob  
Moody Eclipse 33 Pyewacket – crew – Fi, Chris & Beth  
Moody 36 Crwydr – crew – Bethan & Dave (and Debbie up to Cork)  
Elan 362 Be Traist – crew – Liz & David  
Maxi 38 Carpe Diem – crew – Eve & Darrel  
Jeanneau Sunfast 40.3 Liquid Asset – crew – Jane & Eric  
Amel Santorin 46 Ocean Hobo – crew – Linda & Ian