

A Summer in the Baltic

by Ian Park - “Ocean Hobo”

With some sadness we waved goodbye as the RWYC contingent of Celtic Cruise headed south for home and we turned north for the Caledonian canal. Best behaviour required - we were picking up the Commodore and Mo!

And Scotland put on its finest display of the wet stuff as they stepped off the bus at



Corpach. And we were due for an immediate departure up the eight lock gates of Neptune's Staircase just when you thought it couldn't rain any harder. Oh dear!

Of course it is mandatory to tow your boat through the locks to ensure no diesel fumes gather - gatherings in Scotland having been banned many years ago!

Two people to pull and two to fend off through each lock ensured that by the time we moored up for the night the cockpit was full of dripping clothes and the saloon full of drying people recovering by getting wet on the inside.

And so it went on. The wet weather and the beer o'clock and sundowner recoveries. We managed not to sight any monsters, but had many good nights; none more so than at Fort Augustus where the Commodore and the Skipper tested the beer in all the pubs before ending the night in the Legion (*they drop the British bit up there!*). We said our goodbyes at Inverness. Mo and JJ said they were going home to dry out!

As the RWYC Cruise boats we're considering how to get home, we too were contending with incessant low pressure systems to exit the Moray Firth. In Whitehills marina we met up with another Caernarfon boat - JolieF- heading across the North Sea. We eventually spotted a two day window of strong southerly winds and both boats cast off, they for Norway and us for the Skagerrak.

The North Sea was lumpy but the crossing was fast enough. Navigation was assured by the horizon being visible all night this far north and the constant sight of looms and lights of oil and gas platforms, all marked on the chart.



It was Linda who said at 4.00 am on day 3 'Why don't we go through this Limfjord Canal instead of motoring all the way through the Skagerrak' (*the wind having vanished*). Being an obedient Skipper I acquiesced immediately.

I thought it was only Holland that was flat and it was good to have the chart plotter to spot the entrance.

The Limfjord is a series of inland lakes connected by dredged channels with little navigation buoys marking the route (*binoculars essential*). The channels and lakes are generally around 5 to 6 metres deep with many parts less. Navigation is made easier if you look out for where the birds are walking rather than swimming.

That said in parts there is some pretty big traffic sharing quite narrow spaces, and there is never an argument about the stand on vessel.

Wind farms proliferate both on land and sea. They don't cause a problem. Everyone just sails through the middle of them. It is a very sailing orientated country and it seems the done thing to sail everywhere you can through the Limfjord.

When we reached the Baltic we expected to be sailing in deep water again. We were, but the Danish notion of deep is 10 metres and up to two miles off shore you can expect to be in an average depth of 6 metres. A bit unnerving at first but you do get used to it especially as the highest tidal range is around 6 inches.



The next surprise was that we always had anchorages to ourselves or just one other boat. And with the shallow water and mud and sand bottom anchoring was easy.

We did tackle the marinas. If you contact the Harbour office it is by mobile phone, not VHF. If you phone you get the same reply, 'Come in look for a green plaque and go in, don't use the berths with a red plaque.' Fine where there is a pick up buoy to fasten a stern rope to before squeezing in between the other boats and passing your bow ropes

to the helping hands of the fellow sailors that are always there. The Danes speak impeccable English, so conversation is easy.

Box moorings are easy too if you are a sensible size boat. You have to spot the width markings as well as the green and red plaques. You find one the width of your boat, jam your mid ships between the posts to put stern lines on, then forward again against neighbouring boats to pass bow lines ashore. When you have a boat with a 4 metre beam you find yourself playing hide and seek to find a space.....

When you get ashore you go to the parking machine touch 'English' on the screen follow the instructions for boat length, number of nights, shower and electricity, put your credit card in and you are issued with a sticky label with your leaving date that attaches to your pulpit and a plastic card that operates doors, electricity etc. You put the card back in the same machine before you leave and the refund for the card deposit and any other money you haven't used is refunded. Average cost for a 46' Yacht was £24 a night.



The marinas have picnic tables on the pontoons and there is almost always a kitchen room often fully equipped with cooker, fridge, microwave, dishwasher, cutlery, plates and beer and wine glasses. Leave it as you find it. And people just do. Most marinas also have adjoining camper van spaces that have electric sockets and toilet emptying facilities - speaking of which they also provide free to use holding tank emptying units.

Another intriguing point was that no one locks their motors to their dinghy, and no one locks their dinghy to the shore. No one bothers locking up their bicycles either. What a difference to our society. The Danes are a very contented people.



Summer houses are a feature of Danish life, well maintained and never vandalised.

In this photo we are anchored at the popular holiday island of Ærøskøbing. There are four other boats in the bay. Many local boats do not have an anchor, nor a locker, nor bow

roller. Some do have stern anchors. The weather is very similar to ours. The days are long with daylight from 4.00 am to 11.00 pm. and the season short.

By September the main holiday season was over and the sailing solitude was only interrupted at weekends. We had visitors of course. If you want to know the saga of Marisa and Aled and the Royal Danish Yacht Club, buy them a drink at the bar!

We did hear from a lonely couple from the Celtic Cruise - Bill and Laurie on Toodle Oo, who had gone north to the Orkneys to head for the Lofoten Islands. The cold was too much and they had headed south, holed up in gales in the Skagerrak.

We met up with them in the islands off Gothenburg; another cruising paradise. Here we watched the deployment of stern anchors. After several days sailing in company and soaking both our mobile phones (*another drink in the bar for that tale*), both boats set off back through the Limfjord to wend our ways south for them and north for us.



Having battled the f7 headwinds we motored into Inverness marina to wait for our return crew for the east to west traverse of the Caledonian Canal. John and Julie must have pre-booked all the Scottish sunshine through John's Royal Stewart connections!!



Another memorable journey, another night in the 'Legion', Ben Nevis in blue sky and sunshine and the journey was all to quickly over.

Linda and I were treated to beautiful weather down the west coast of Mull and onwards to Islay once more.

Ireland was less kind with gales in Carrickfergus and coast hugging to Skerries before a rough crossing of the Irish Sea and a more pleasant trip the long way round to Puffin Island and home.

For all the great places we visited on this trip, coming back down the coast to the northern entrance to the Strait we agreed that we are so fortunate to live in such an idyllic place and to have made so many great friends through sailing and the Royal Welsh Yacht Club.