

BLACK JACK – BEAULIEU to BRAYE and back.

Having had our Crabber 24, Black Jack, for 3 seasons now I thought it about time we went further afield. With a week available last June it was decided that my brother and I would go "somewhere", whatever the weather. As June approached, long term forecasts became shorter and eyed constantly. It was looking favourable-ish to do something more than harbour hop around the Solent. Having flown to Alderney for my 50th birthday I had always wanted to sail there in my own boat. So the Channel Islands beckoned. We "picked" a good forecast, like you do, but as usual it was not the one that presented itself.

With Black Jack full of beer and bacon we departed our Beaulieu mooring on the evening Thursday 19th June. First stop was a quick overnighter on an outer mooring off Yarmouth ready for our early departure on the ebb the following day. Not before a trip ashore to the Kings Head.

We woke early with thick heads from our obligatory liquid catch up and were rewarded with a fantastic sunrise as we slipped the mooring. Heading West through Hurst narrows and a sharp turn to port we set sail for Alderney. After a couple of hours glorious reaching the wind decided to swing South and presented us with a F4 on the nose (I knew I'd picked the wrong forecast). Determined to carry on and wanting to make landfall in daylight we had a pretty awful 10 hours motoring. Heading due south in increasing seas, not helped by that last beer the previous night. We made Braye Harbour early evening. With relief, we ventured ashore and settled for supper in the Mai Thai restaurant on Le Val in St Anne.

Saturday we spent exploring the whole island. Deserted beaches and WW2 fortifications a plenty, Alderney is stunning with its wide open landscapes, green pastures, turquoise seas, and rugged cliffs. An abundance of wild flowers but no sighting of any famous Alderney blonde hedgehogs. During our 11 mile walk we also took advantage of a good view of the infamous Alderney Race from the zigzag track above Fort Clonque. This being part of our course to follow the next day. Something we knew we had to time right.



An eerie Fort Clonque



Sunday we left for Guernsey with the south going tide and then beating our way in quite large seas. Six hours and many tacks later we moored alongside the walk ashore pontoon in the outer harbour of St Peter Port. We were amused as the wacky races ensued once the tide was clear of the marina sill for those wishing a berth inside the inner harbour. On Monday the weather turned for the worst and it rained all day. A rest day sampling the local hostelries was in order. Lunch consisted of local cheese and butter (very yellow) on crusty baguettes. Souvenirs bought and a good walk around in the rain we settled for a tasty supper of mussels in the Boathouse on Victoria Pier. Tuesday morning brought about clear skies and light winds.



We motored round to the fuel pontoon to restock on cheap diesel and ventured out to explore the smaller islands of Jethou, Herm and Sark. We settled for and picked up an empty mooring in La Greve de la Ville bay in the lee of the eastern coast of Sark. The trip ashore required us to portage the dinghy to the top of beach and climb the cliff path.

We then spent 3 hours walking around the island taking in Little Sark by crossing over the picturesque La Coupee . We also explored Creux Harbour on our return. Overnight on the mooring we rolled around a bit in the gentle swell but it was bearable (after a few beers).

View from La Coupee, Sark with Brecqhou, Herm, Jethou and Guernsey in the distance.



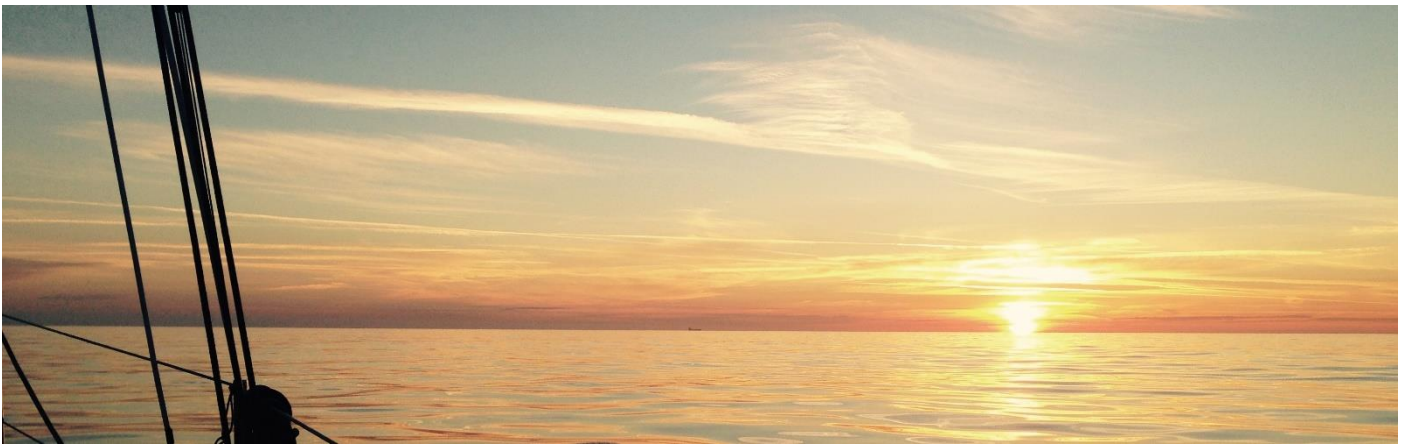
La Greve de la Ville anchorage

Mid-morning Wednesday we slipped the mooring bound back to Braye Harbour, Alderney. A lovely sail was had, arriving at the race as planned, attaining 13 knots over the ground and popping out the other end like a cork.



Black Jack centre in Braye Harbour.

We comfortably picked up another empty visitors mooring and ventured ashore to the comfort of the Divers Inn for a few beers and the Braye Harbour hotel for supper. I was quite surprised by the waiters' declaration that they had run out of Crab and were waiting for it to arrive on a boat from the mainland.



To make sure we hit the tidal gate at the Needles an early start was required on Thursday. We slipped an hour before another outstanding sunrise. Our trip back was made in glorious sunshine, not a breath of wind and a few fog patches. Unfortunately, we had to motor-sail for the majority of the return trip successfully dodging the channel shipping. We used up the cheap fuel that probably would have lasted me the rest of the season and were pleased to see the welcome sight of the Needles. The wind picked up just as we entered the Solent and we sailed back to Beaulieu in the evening sunshine.

A great trip.

Steve Mitchell

- Notes to self:
1. Take some spare fuel cans for cheap fuel
 2. A week isn't enough!