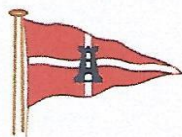


EAST COWES



SAILING CLUB

The Accidental Rally
A Postcard from France
September 2017



1000 Saturday 2nd September: Gordon (skipper of *Panda*) and David (skipper of *Gina*) bumped into each other (much to their mutual surprise) in the Port Chantereyne marina lobby.

When two members of East Cowes Sailing Club meet in a French marina, it's a happy coincidence. When four boats show-up, it's a short-notice ECSC rally!

All four boats knew of each other's plans but there was no firm intention (only possibly a faint ambition) to meet-up.

How then did *Panda*, *Gina*, *Tideline* and *CScope* come to be together in Cherbourg on Saturday 2nd September?

Panda, new, replacement engine delivered, was presented with a dilemma. Start work on fitting the new engine immediately or squeeze the goodness out of the last dregs of the season using the, perfectly serviceable, existing engine. That's no choice at all. Gordon made a single-handed passage to Cherbourg on Thursday 31st August.

Gina was booked on the *Seadog Owner's Association* rally in Cherbourg on the weekend of the 9th and 10th September and was ready to set off whenever the weather allowed. *Gina* (whose crew carries the psychological scars of a particularly nasty crossing, in *Gina*, to Calais a couple of years ago) was sorely tempted by the smooth to slight sea state and fair winds forecast and so set off for Cherbourg from one of the buoys outside Yarmouth on Friday 1st September.

Both *Tideline* and *CScope* had decided on a late summer/early autumn cruise in company taking a lead from the weather for their choice of destinations. Both boats set out from Portland towards Alderney on Thursday 31st August. The plan was to move down to Guernsey. However, the forecast wind was turning north westerly, making Braye harbour potentially untenable (for the sane). Nearby Cherbourg was an obvious safe haven. Once the tide across the Cotentin peninsula allowed, *Tideline* and *CScope* motor sailed from Alderney to Port Chantereyne; arriving in

the late afternoon of Saturday 2nd September.

Handy tip: Current, card-carrying members of the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) enjoy a whopping 20% reduction in berthing fees at Port Chantereyne.

1800 Saturday 2nd September: The skippers declared the occasion an ECSC Rally; to be celebrated with a meal at the marina restaurant on the following day.



1 - Gordon, Mike, Bob and David declared an ECSC rally (picture by Ben)

1900 Sunday 3rd September: That evening, we were buried in oysters, beef and alcohol. Lorraine from *Gina* helped turn the whole evening into a thoroughly enjoyable delight largely (but not entirely) bereft (due to her demure presence) of double-entendre, politics and over-indulgence.



2 - Rally Celebrations

0700 Monday 4th September: *Panda* left at dawn. Not before Ben from *Tideline*, the first customer of a local boulangerie, delivered piping hot croissants at a run to Gordon as he slipped *Panda's* lines.

At 2100 GMT, Gordon reported *Panda's* safe arrival at her Medina pontoon.

Tuesday 5th to Thursday 14th September: Day-after-day the forecast was unfavourable.

Some days you wouldn't want to be sitting in a boat in a sheltered marina never mind venturing out into La Manche.

The *Seadog Owner's Association* cancelled its rally. Unfortunately, too late for *Gina* to return with *Panda*. On the other hand, the stopover turned into a series of opportunities not to be missed.

Thereafter, the weather closed in from the North West. The hope posed by an Azores high was tantalising but slow arriving. Unsettled, would be the best description for the weather during our enforced layover.

Nothing for it, but to thoroughly enjoy all the sightseeing, dining and drinking opportunities on offer and wait for a weather window to open, or better still an improving trend to become established.

Dining, Sightseeing and Drinking

Shortly after Gordon returned home, Ben invited everyone aboard *Tideline* for his freshly home-cooked chicken and bacon pieces, stuffed with blue cheese, and served with ratatouille.



3 - Fine fare from bashful Ben (behind the camera)

Early on, Bob, Ben and Mike trekked up to the, easy to miss, American Civil War cemetery which holds just three graves from the sea battle of the *USS Kearsarge* and *CSS Alabama*.

The first trip where everyone participated was to Barfleur. The buses run from a bus station opposite the railway station. There are no return tickets but a single adult ticket is a snip at 2 euro 30 (to any destination served by the

bus operator). Our bus was modern and comfortable. We gathered on the back seats like a bunch of cheeky kids.



4 - Cheeky kids (taken by Ben)

Barfleur is famous for, amongst other things, being the putative embarkation port of William the Conqueror's invasion fleet and sea harvested mussels.

Mike, a frequent visitor over the years, recommended a quayside brasserie for our lunch.

For the main course, we ordered 3 portions of moules with various local sauces and one portion of smoked herring; both house specialities. Lorraine, not a great fan of mussels or fish, chose a plain omelette.

The cover picture, taken by Ben, is from that lunch. That day, the weather largely played ball but there were lunchtime showers. It's also a sideways homage to [The Umbrellas of Cherbourg](#) film and the outrageously expensive, tourist fleecing [Cherbourg Umbrella Factory](#) both of which cropped up every now and again as topics of conversation during our time in Cherbourg.

For pudding, apple tart and Normandy tart proved popular. One person was destined for disappointment. There was one apple tart short. Lorraine quickly switched to profiteroles with chocolate sauce and despite the praise for the Normandy and apple tarts thought her choice equally delightful.



5 - Scrumptious profiteroles (taken By Mike)

After lunch, the older generation strolled around the harbour and adjacent bay while Ben galloped off to the Barfleur lighthouse to stretch his legs. We returned to Cherbourg on the bus in the late afternoon. A wilting Mike resolved that on our next trip we would walk first and lunch later.

For our next group outing, we used the train to travel to Carentan. There appeared to be some partial industrial action affecting the railway station at Cherbourg. The ticket office was closed. Instead, we had to use an automated ticket machine in the station concourse. Fortunately, a smartly dressed female assistant was on hand to ask the questions and push the buttons. The rail tickets were roughly double the cost of the bus but still incredibly good value.

The train was modern, comfortable and fast. In no time, we disembarked at Carentan which is just a few stops away from Cherbourg on the main line to Paris. Carentan is a larger town than Barfleur but has much less imposing marine area in the shape of a largish inland marina with tidal river access through a lock.

We walked down from the station through the town to the marina. The marina is effectively a long, broad canal forming a wider extension of the tidal river. We strolled down the tree-lined basin to an almost hidden feat of civil engineering. The N13 trunk road carves its way under the marina which is transformed into a rather magnificent aqueduct as a result. We made our way over the lock gate to the other side of the marina

and back towards the town. All the marina pontoons are on this side. Mike pointed out the berth where he'd kept his boat for a number of years.

Back at the head of the marina, there were fewer choices of eatery than on the Barfleur quayside. We chose an up-market pizzeria, popular with the locals. Our waiter spoke excellent English which made ordering food and drink easy. Our pizzas were competently produced and reasonably priced but nothing special.

On our return to the station, we found the main building closed. This seemed to be news to the locals and we suspected industrial action to be to blame again.

Our train was a double-decker. We used the top deck for the return journey which lifted us above the tops of the hedgerows with a much improved view back to Cherbourg.

Our last outing together was to the town(s) of Barnville - Carteret. One half inland and rural with the other half rich and touristy with the remnants of a fishing industry alongside a modern marina on one side and a few eateries and shops on the other leading to a long promenade fronting the river estuary.

We again boarded a bus from Cherbourg paying the princely one-way fare of 2 euro 30 and made our way to the back seats. This time, our bus driver had the air of a bit of a dragon (as we shall see, appearances can be deceptive). She gesticulated to Ben to rearrange his legs out of the aisle and off the seats. Ben complied with alacrity.

The split nature of the town is reflected in its bus stops. The first stop is outside the marina in Carteret. This stop is not generally used past the 3rd September. The next stop is outside the Barneville town hall. For its final stop, the bus loops back to the old railway station in Carteret before returning to Cherbourg.

Being first on the bus your correspondent booked two tickets to Carteret.

Next on, Bob and Ben, who had a particular eatery in mind for lunch, booked to the town hall.

The bus swung down past the marina in Carteret and stopped. The bus driver called out that this was our stop. Bob and Ben weren't for moving and stayed put. The bus driver, seeing that her message wasn't getting across, turned to a young lady passenger to translate and mediate. Bob and Ben managed to convey that they wanted the next stop, being the mairie in Barneville. Looks like our bus driver, stopped at the marina out of season to try and be helpful to her tourist passengers. This good turn also had later ramifications.

Once off the bus, Bob and Ben led the way through Barneville to their objective; *Le Noroît* kept by Emilie and Stéphanie.

Ben had been particularly impressed last year when the proprietor had praised his linguistic skills and plied him with Calvados. Mike had less favourable impressions of the effect the apple brandy had on the bill.

We sat down to the very reasonably priced set menu. The food was a credit to the chef and the proprietors. Inevitably, we ordered Calvados. It was presented with an intriguing sprinkling of coffee beans on the serving plate around the glass.



6 - Calvados taken by Emilie

Well satisfied with our meal, we walked back to Carteret down a country road flanked by crops; drainage channels and the odd rural building converted into a second home.

Ben spotted an already refurbished level crossing keeper's cottage and took a few hopeful photographs. Later, on the bus back to Cherbourg, his property-owning hopes were dashed when he saw the 140,000 euro price tag on the internet.

We arrived at the bus stop outside the Carteret marina in good time to see the bus pass by at the top of the street on its way to the town hall.

Time for a rethink; we decided to take the next (and last that day) bus from the old railway station in Carteret. This would give time for window shopping and a chance to experience the eye-watering touristy prices of the local bars.

While on the subject of bars, our local in Cherbourg deserves a mention. The *El Dorado* bar and micro brewery saw a fair bit of us in threes and fours and even the full party on the odd occasion.



7 - The *El Dorado* serves a fine pint (taken by Mike)

Friday 15th September: The weather had calmed and showed the beginnings of a viable window. The skippers conferred. Saturday seemed a good bet. Wind strength would be light but in the wrong direction; on the nose. Mike reckoned that if we shaped a course towards the east of the Isle of Wight and the wind shifted a little to the North West we might be able to gain a little drive in our mains. The swell was forecast at 0.8 of a

metre and the sea state forecast at slight. This was the best opportunity we were likely to see.

0530 GMT Saturday 16th September:

Tideline, *CScape* and *Gina* slipped their lines in the dark one after the other and headed for the eastern entrance to the Grande Rade. *Tideline* set her main. *CScape* set a reefed main and her mizzen. There being no chance of *Gina* achieving a sufficient angle of attack to the wind for her main to draw, she set just her mizzen to dampen any extremes of her motion.

0600 GMT Saturday 16th September: The three boats left harbour into a frisky swell. Thankfully, the swell settled down after a few miles.



8 - *Gina* leaving Cherbourg (taken by Ben)

Not far into the passage, and well before the shipping routes, Mike radioed a merchantman enquiring if she was going to cross his bows. The merchantman could see *CScape*'s AIS transmission but became slightly confused by the name *Tideline*. The confusion was soon corrected and the merchantman reported she would pass ahead of the flotilla. Bob was very pleased that his, recently acquired AIS transponder was performing so well.

Indeed, Mike's daughter picked up *CScape*'s AIS transmission back home in the U.K. and followed the group's steady progress across the Channel.

During the voyage we modified our course to close the west rather than the east of the Isle of Wight. Being headed by the wind, we were

making slower progress than we would have liked. This meant a later landfall than planned. As Mike commented, Poole is a lot easier to close than Bembridge in the dark, when you're tired.

The Channel passage followed a familiar pattern. As the French coast disappeared, the first of the shipping routes came into view. As we cleared the eastbound route and entered the separation area, we started to see traffic from the westbound route. As we left the shipping routes behind, the English coast became slowly more distinct.

We came in range of the maritime and safety broadcasts from the U.K. Coastguard. They reported a forecast wind direction of north easterly. Our favoured destinations were Swanage or Studland. These anchorages are not recommended in north easterlies. Mike suggested we enter Poole Harbour and anchor in the South Deep.

Closing the coast seemed to take an age as afternoon turned into evening which turned into night. Closer in, we reported pot markers to one another as these hazards became more difficult to see in the fading light.

As we entered Poole Harbour, we closed up and moved into line astern behind *Tideline*. The entry to the South Deep is well lit and the lighting of navigation aids extends some way towards the anchorage. In its later stages, however, the buoys and perches are unlit. Ben was a great help in lighting up the channel marks with a spotlight from the bow of *Tideline*.

2100 GMT Saturday 16th September:

Anchors dug in to the glutinous mud of the South Deep; the voyage was safely concluded.

Sunday 17th September: Gordon from *Panda* sailed over from East Cowes to join us at anchor for the final night of our cruise.



9 - Leaving Poole Harbour (*Panda, CScape and Gina*)
Taken by Ben from the stern of *Tideline*

Monday 18th September: We decided to up-anchor at 1300; leave Poole Harbour and make our way home, with the odd stopover for the odd boat.

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