

Passage Plan

I thought an article about my return across the Channel and how something this simple can go wrong might be of interest.

Dan and I had a good fast trip to Cherbourg via the Needles on the Friday and enjoyed a lazy day in Town on the Saturday. The weather for the return from the marina office and via the internet was suitable although the visibility would be Poor over some of the journey. This is not unusual and poor visibility is normal. Little Spirit is equipped with an AIS transceiver, radar and radar transponder.

For me this trip is a milk run. Sunday morning up early to rig the boat, get the latest weather, run though the navigation prepared the night before, use the loo and off.

Unfortunately the loo blocked and took 2 hours to clear. Clean myself up and check the navigation for a late departure.

Two hours late arriving at the Needle still gave 3 hours of flood and still daylight. Off we went and had a fast sail in a slightly rough beam sea but nothing exceptional. To stop the genoa flapping and get best speed we didn't run straight downwind but about 10 degrees west of the direct course. This made an arrival in the middle of Christchurch Bay and a gybe as the tide turned to flood and take us home. Perfect. Kept amused drinking tea, eating and looking for ships visually and on AIS. We estimated about one and a half miles visibility.

About 3 hours before the gybe I changed the chart plotter from Course Up to North UP. This was done so that the projected track was steady and not swinging from Portland to Newtown. After the gybe and making good progress and mist started to close in. Nothing visible on the AIS. The sea was now much calmer and we soon made The Bridge Buoy.

By now we were in a quarter of a mile visibility and the Needle Lighthouse was not visible nor was it horn audible. I did a course change to get out of the rough water on the reef. The chart plotter changed and when I looked at it didn't make sense. It did not agree with the steering or electronic compass. So I circled the Bridge buoy and made a positive identification.

To continue on a compass bearing was not sensible and to try and make Poole via safe water would be difficult. So I asked for help and the Lymington Lifeboat very kindly came and took me in

to off Yarmouth where the sea was flat, the wind calm and the visibility was 3 miles.

So what went wrong? Habit! I have used my chart plotter in Course Up mode for 17 years. It is like driving home you need to go to the supermarket in town but turn into your street out of habit. I just didn't remember that I had changed the orientation of the chart plotter. So when I looked at the plotter it was displaying about 90 degrees from what habit told me it should. So a press of a button to an unusual screen caused a lot of embarrassment.

Brian
Little Spirit