

East Cowes S.C. – Cruise to Northern France

Cherbourg to Honfleur. By Geoff W

It all started on Friday 21st June with Paul and Karen along with their brass instruments heading to Hardway S.C. on board Brassed Off.

They were to play with the Gosport Brass band at an event on Saturday morning.

Waiting on the pontoon were PLC (Jo and Rupert), Little Nic (Carl and Melissa), and Exhuma (Dave and Lynn).

Crazee B (Sue and Chris) had departed early hours of Saturday morning.

Saturday 22nd June

I travelled down from the Birmingham area early morning to meet up with the others at Hardway, and put my kit on board Brassed Off, my holiday home for the next two weeks.

Paul and Karen in looking smart in their band uniforms, the rest of us decidedly casual in holiday style jeans and tee shirts.

After a discussion regarding tides and other sailing matters, we decided that we would depart Hardway at 0100hrs Sunday morning. At this time of year that meant just a few hours of night sailing and we would be crossing the shipping lanes in daylight and be in Cherbourg in plenty of time for a beer in the evening.

Sunday 23rd June

As planned an early departure from Hardway. We motored or motor sailed much of the way across, with short periods where the wind filled in enough to be able turn the engines off.

We all duly arrived in Cherbourg early Sunday afternoon in time for beer o'clock. And met up with Crazee B and Mike & American Bob on Tideline.

Evening drinks in L'Eldorado bar and microbrewery. Probably the cheapest drinks we were to get all week. And a walk around town for late night pizzas.

Monday 24th June

Early morning walk to the boulangerie for the traditional croissants and baguettes for breakfast.

Then the inevitable trip to the hypermarket. Despite trying not to buy too much we all ended up with trollies full of beer, lager, rum, and other French delights. Some people let the side down by buying food!! But we still allowed that to be put in the trollies that we had to push back.

For a change we went to Le Bayou bar, where we met the £7 pint which was to follow us around for the next week. This now seems to be the going rate for beer in France with the weak pound.

Tuesday 25th June

Off to St. Vaast. Motored round via Barfleur light house in near calm conditions



Little Nic off Barfleur. On autopilot!

Out to eat again that evening. Introduced some people to whelks. All seemed to enjoy them. (or so they said)

We were holed up in St. Vaast for a few days as a showery north westerly F5/6 blew up the channel and into Baie de Seine. The showers occasionally forced us to take shelter in the nearest café and of course we went the Maison Gosselin food and drink emporium, spending more money on food.

Evening were spent in the Marina Bar watching the ladies' football. Far too exciting for some.

Finally Friday afternoon the wind died away and we got a good weather forecast for a trip to Grandcamp Saturday morning.

Saturday 29th June

A very early start to get out of St. Vaast as soon as the gate opened at about 05:30hrs and reach Grandcamp before that gate closed.

As compensation for the early start we were treated to a glorious sunrise.



Brassed Off in the Sunrise

But soon after we hit masses of loose seaweed which was to cause problems for all at some point. On the radio we heard a vessel named Arcadia in trouble

with a fouled propeller. What was a cruise ship doing down here? And if Arcadia's prop was fouled what chance did we have in the sea of weed?

The approach channel to Grandcamp had even more weed patches and in the narrow entrance it was impossible to miss them. Fortunately, once tied up, a few bursts of forward/astern cleared our props.



Grandcamp Entrance (Exhuma on the right)

A small local boat moored adjacent to us had to send a diver down to clear his propeller in water that I would not even have dipped my toe in. I hope the diver had a good shower afterwards.

There was a small seafood market on the quayside, but we missed the bigger Sunday street market which in the past has had some good cheese and cured meat stalls. Just a short walk away down the beach is a D-Day landings museum and an RAF memorial is on the north side of the harbour.

Sunday 30th June

Another early start to catch the tide heading east along the coast towards Ouistreham. Crazee B departed very early and called in at Port en Bessin where they did find a street market.



Including a cheese stall!



The rest of the fleet had a long slow trip in windless conditions up to Ouistreham passing the mulberry harbours at Arromanches. Here we saw a German yacht sailing (drifting on the tide) who we were to see the next day in Ouistreham and find out why he was sailing.

All along the coast was a series of golden beaches which look like places to explore on future trips to this area. We also sailed (motored) past numerous ports which again will have to wait until next time.

There are several cardinal buoys on the approach to Ouistreham and the final approach is down a long channel marked by large buoys and wooden posts.

As we were early for the locks, we rafted up on a waiting pontoon just past the ferry port. The other four boats were already there, and Brassed Off was about 6 boats out. With another 3 or 4 rafts of boats behind us I was worried that we may not make the first lock which is about 3 hours before high water.

Eventually there was movement in the locks with a French trawler making its way out. This was spotted by those in the know who cast off and made ready to enter the lock, so we followed suit. Rather early as it turned out as it took a while for the lock to empty, the trawler to exit, and the lock operator be ready for the inbound traffic.

Eventually the green entry lights came on and it was like the start of the Grand National as everybody surged in the lock. No need to worry about getting in, the lock was 200m long and wide enough to raft off both side if need be.

Once through the lock it was like been on the Norfolk Broads. Still waters surrounded by grassy banks and houses.

It was then a race for the alongside berths in the marina.

The evening was a quick dash across the locks to find a brasserie still open and serving food. Chicken and chips for most of us. And scratching around to find the final few euros to pay the bill.

First job Monday morning for some was a trip to the 'distributeur de billets'.



PLC and Brassed Off in Ouistreham

Monday 1st July

We all had once again had suffered from the huge clumps of weeds floating off the coast. So out with the boat hooks to clear our props. Luckily the water was very clear so we could see what we were doing.

Soon we saw the very slow-moving boat we had seen on Sunday come into the marina and straight into the waiting cradle to be lifted out. His prop and rudder were completely covered in the terrible weed. It took him 20 minutes or so to clear it all off before he relaunched ready to go again.

The day was spent in Ouistreham town which was surprising pleasant. I was expecting a dirty old port town, but instead found sunny pedestrianised streets with a selection of bars/brasseries, boulangeries and boucherie along with the usual tat shops. And of course a selection war museums and seaside stalls on the beach.

On the evening some boats decided to take a walk over to the self-service diesel pump on the marina entrance. It seemed simple enough, put your card in, take fuel and remove card. The shock came the next day when trying to use the card again in the shops or checking bank balances. The system had taken as much money as you had in the account and locked it so you couldn't get any more money out. Take heed if you use these fuel pumps abroad.

Tuesday 2nd July

Following a discussion Monday evening about the lock opening times and French English clock times we were all up early and out into the canal to await the lock opening of the day. At first it looked as if we were the only boats out. And I was thinking I had got the times wrong. Eventually we were joined by another boat and the lock entry lights came on.

Never have I been so relieved to see a green lock entry light.

Once out of the lock and into the channel we were once again greeted by masses of floating seaweed.

Another day of motoring along wide sandy beaches to Deauville/Trouville.

Straight down the entrance channel into the river and into the marina. A few laps of the marina looking for the visitor's moorings, only to find that they were through the swing bridge in the inner basin.

Just looking around you could see this town was going to be pricey as can be seen from the photos below.





Once again, we had suffered from the weed. This time PLC had a very badly fouled prop. So, whilst we enjoyed a walk around Deauville Rupert took the plunge and dived into the marina water to clear the prop.

In the afternoon we visited the Trouville side of town which looked more down to earth but turned out to be expensive as well. That much so that we spent the evening on the boats drinking our supermarket bought boxes of wine.

Wednesday 3rd July

Off to our last French destination of the week.

Crazee B left the pontoon early only to be blocked by the footbridge, which had been lowered to allow pedestrians across. After 3 laps of the basin they finally tied up again to await the bridge reopening.

The bridge finally lifted, and we all made our way out. At last there was some wind and we were able to do some sailing.

Across the Seine estuary towards Le Havre and then tacking up river towards Pont de Normandie. The Seine at this point is as busy as the Solent, with a steady flow of ships.

Eventually we came level with the lock in to Honfleur, down with the sails and motor into the lock to meet up with Little Nic. The lock here operates in on the hour and out on the half hour, so Little Nic had to wait for us and the clock to tick round.

Once through the lock we tied up on a waiting pontoon to await the bridge opening to give access to the main yacht basin.

Once into the basin we tied up on finger pontoons facing straight in to the pubs and restaurants lining the quayside. 10yard walk to the pub!





Honfleur is a bustling tourist village with lots of overpriced bars and cafes on the waterfront. Go back a street away from the quay and prices drop a little. During the summer months there is an evening market spread across the streets.

The Brassed Off crew visited Naturospace which is a butterfly farm type attraction. Personally, I took about 100 photos, of which only 4 or 5 actually contained butterflies. They were just too fast and would not keep still.

With the prospect of a windless crossing lasting 18 hours it was time for another visit to the self-service diesel pump. Another disaster!

After just one fill up the pump stopped working. And with everybody needing fuel for the trip home a walk to the 'local' service station was in order. The two wheel chairs and every available fuel container was pressed into use. The nearest service station was about 30min walk away. Probably took a little longer on the return journey carrying many litres of best white diesel.

For the trip home Little Nic And Crazee B decided to depart on the evening lock on Thursday 4th July and 'sail' through the night for the first part of the passage.

Friday 5th July

The 3 remaining boats left the inner harbour to wait for the 1130 lock out, which was slightly delayed due to waiting for the tourist boats and traffic passing the in main river.



Brassed Off, PLC and Exhuma in Honfleur lock.

Once out of the lock it was a long motor home to Portsmouth arriving on the Hardway pontoon about 0500 in the morning. We went to bed for a well-deserved rest as everybody else was getting up for the day.

Saturday 6th July

Bingo night at Hardway SC.

Our luck was in, with 3 big money wins towards the end which covered our diesel costs on Brassed Off for the two weeks. I have never spent so much on diesel in a season, yet alone just 2 weeks.

And that was that, with everybody making their way home on Sunday.