



MANCHESTER CRUISING ASSOCIATION

Single-handed to Spain – and Back 7 December 2006 Peter Poole

Peter has been sailing since 1936. Not continuously, of course, and not in the same boat. The first one was a 32' family motor-sailer, kept on the Hamble until 1940 and then the Thames. He first crewed across the Channel in 1951 on a 35' pre-war Hillyard and, the same year, skippered the family boat to Dieppe and Dunkirk. During the next 25 years he covered the coasts of the continent from La Rochelle to the Baltic and to Bergen in Norway and most of the coasts of England, Ireland and Scotland.

In 1956 he moved the boat to Birdham Pool in Chichester harbour and still berths there but since 1991 his boat has been the Nicholson 32 Holly. After retiring he circumnavigated Britain in 1994 and in 1995 made his first crossing of Biscay to Spain. The following year he sailed to Bergen, and each year since then has made about a 2000 mile cruise as well as plenty of other sailing. Since 2000, because of the constraints of arranging crew changes, he has sailed alone on his main cruise. The subject of his talk was his 2003 cruise to Spain.

He set off from Birdham in strong SW winds and headed up the Solent. Beating out of the Needles channel on a foul tide is not much fun (and usually impossible) so he spent his first night cosily in Newtown Creek on the Isle of Wight. It was his last cosy night for a while. In the morning he struck out for Ushant, still in strong winds that soon dropped to leave him motoring across the Channel. Rounding Ushant in fog, he set a course for the Northwest of Spain and crossed the Bay in weather a mix of calms, force 6s and violent electric thunderstorms. On the way he picked up a racing pigeon as passenger for a time. It was a male. Peter, like me, had thought that all such athletes of the wind were female since they would be driven to get back to their nests, their young and to find out what is happening in The Archers. Not true. Males are apparently fretful about what their partners are getting up to while they're away combing the clouds and zoom back ASAP.

By day 4 he was off Cape Villano in an area known locally as the Costa del Morte and, after 695 miles and 5 days 19 hours he edged into Bayona. He had motored for 28 hours in total but had maintained an average of five knots on the passage. Somewhat better he noted than the 45-footer that had dogged him all the way.

Rather than linger, Peter was keen to get value for money for the Portuguese courtesy flag he'd bought so, with a large swell and a NW 5-6, he sailed to Foz do Minho, the first place in Portugal. One entrance was completely impassable in the conditions but the South passage was available, if you didn't mind white water just a few metres away on both sides. He found a sheltered anchorage but was advised to move by a local boat because, they said, it was too shallow. They took him under their wing and kindly guided him to another spot –

where there turned out to be even shallower. After a night of being bitten by muscular mosquitoes and no sleep, he set off feeling his way carefully with a wakeful eye on the chart. Of course, he went aground because the chart bore little relation to the actual topography. So the open sea was more than welcome; it has been his *portus horribilis*. He made a note to buy some mosquito repellent but all he could find later in La Guardia were one litre cans of the stuff. He bought a can, thinking it might see him well through his sailing career, but discovered soon after that he had stowed a half-litre can under a bunk on a previous cruise.

Vigo he liked, especially El Corte Ingles, a cross between Harrods and Selfridges (perhaps Hoopers x Kendalls to us?). And some rather nice sculptures. But the marina was pretty crowded with no space to get your sails down. Combarro he found much changed. At St Martin de el Grove he anchored off and found the town too touristy for his taste.

He spent five days in the Ria de Arosa, enjoying particularly Rianjo and Santa Eugenia de Riviera, and then on to Muros and the village of Finisterre. The yacht club at Camarinas served the best Boeuf Bourguignon he had ever tasted but then it was on to Cabo Villano again (remember, the Coast of Death) and Corme with its new and long sea wall. To La Coruna, the Torre de Hercules (the world's oldest working lighthouse) and more until Cedeira and time to head home. Via Camaret, he and Holly were soon enough back at Birdham Pool.

There were some questions about the practicalities of single-handing. Mainly, how do you get some sleep. Peter has trained himself to survive long periods on 10 minute catnaps, punctuated by a loud alarm clock, and has a number of electronic aids to keep him aware of what's around. As he said, outside the shipping lanes it's quieter than you think: he didn't see a ship on the outward leg until he was off Spain. And of course he wasn't really alone as he revealed in a slip of the tongue or two when he said "we" or "us". He had to explain. When he said "us" he meant himself and Holly; when he said "I" it meant he hadn't consulted the boat.

Around seventy members attended Peter's presentation in spite of awful weather and the threatened AGM to follow. Holly was there in spirit. We all learnt something about Spain and more about the cruising impulse.

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