

GCCC Summer Cruise 2017 St Vaast - Fecamp

The 2017 summer cruise to Normandy developed from the one-week Baie de Seine cruise of 2015 but with the addition of extra venues and lay-days to make up a full two-week sojourn. Six boats signed up for the cruise with only one 11th hr withdrawal due to a forecast of strong winds and lumpy seas. The five boats setting off across the Channel were Shibumi, KiK, Cadh'Ruadh, Lacewing & Quickstep.

The strong wind forecast for Saturday - the day of our expected departure - delayed the fleet by 24 hrs until daybreak on Sunday for a crossing that started quite smoothly.

By the time we reached mid-channel the wind had picked up to around F5-6. The fleet made good progress, close-hauled and well-reefed on a starboard tack all the way to St Vaast, keeping us on schedule and compensating for our delayed start intended to head for Cherbourg.

KiK kept just ahead of the fleet, sliding past Barfleur closely followed by Shibumi and Lacewing with Cadh' Ruadh and Quickstep a little further downtide to the east.

After dropping the hook in a spacious anchorage outside St Vaast, we waited an hour or so for the evening gate before trundling in to finish our onboard evening meals as darkness fell and we snuggled down for a welcome night's sleep.



The next day we explored the town although, being Monday, most of it was closed - excepting Monseur Gosselin's old 'emporium', open for souvenirs and some last-minute provisioning. The local oyster beds, for which St Vaast is famous, were quite extensive - a pity the fish market was closed!

Some of the group took an afternoon amphibious 'Duck' ride to nearby Tatihou Island to see the fortifications, Vauban's Tower, Botanical Gardens & Maritime Museum - all proving very worthwhile.

A tranquil and sunny evening brought out our disposable BBQs for a jolly gathering on a grassed area by the sea wall where we congratulated ourselves on a successful crossing and welcomed Clive's brother-in-law, David, over from the USA to be press-ganged aboard Quickstep!

We had exceptionally good weather throughout the cruise with warm winds and mostly calm seas calling for shorts and T-shirts on most days. The Tuesday mid-morning departure from St Vaast gave us a gentle breeze, warm clear blue skies and delightful views of the coastline stretching far along the Baie de Seine.

By-passing the Iles St Marcouf at the top of the tide we entered the old fishing port of Grandcamp-Maisy, in ample time before the gates were due to close on a falling tide around mid-afternoon.

Mooring on the marina hammerheads Cadh'Ruadh enjoyed a close encounter with a rather briskly handled Ovni while Quickstep demonstrated some delft stern manouvring into a tight spot down the trot.

Although the harbour has had a reputation for being a little 'smelly' and a few bubbles could be seen rising from the seabed, only the barest hint of a sulphurous odour could be detected in an otherwise very convenient harbour.

Surrounded by excellent restaurants this provided a far more convenient stopover than nearby Carentan with it's lengthy 5M approach along a narrow canal and a potentially challenging tidal bore.

After freshening up with a change of clothes we booked into 'Le Maree' restaurant for an excellent evening dinner.



Wednesday saw us heading for Port-en-Bessin, 14nM east of Grandcamp and our 'stowaways', Martin & Jane Stott, using their fluent French to confirm that the only available (non-bookable) six visitor's berths were still vacant.

Essentially a commercial-only fishing port, the tourist office supervising the visitor's berths were very helpful and the port was well-positioned as a half-way stopover on our way to Courseulles for the next day.

Tucked in and rafted alongside the single pontoon we all felt quite cosy and very convenient for the local amenities, although access to the electricity pods some distance away - high on the harbour wall - called out for our extension leads.

Here we enjoyed Clive's afternoon tea & cake!

The views from high up above the fortifications were quite stunning and we could have walked for miles along the cliff-lined coast.

Some of us enjoyed a pre-prandial drink at Café 47 on the promenade corner (after the 47th regiment taking the town in 1944 until reinforcements arrived) and later that evening we ate aboard our boats or at a local restaurant according to our preferred tastes.

Next day we headed 14M for Courseulles in a gentle breeze, passing through 'Port Winston' at Arromanche on the way to witness the Mulberry Harbours - an eerie and experience compared to the scenes on D-Day, 9 days (and 73yrs) earlier!!



The Memorial Cross of Lorraine provided a clear landmark at the entrance to Courseulles harbour ahead of the Canadian D-Day landing beaches and where de Gaulle later stood on his first step ashore.



Once through the gate we were each directed to one of several berths spread-out towards the far end of the marina through a long and narrow fairway, fenders lifted in order to pass through!

We were immediately welcomed by Dominique, Commodore of the Courseulles Yacht Club, who later joined us for a pontoon exchange of burgees and a tot of Calvados before we all parted to take our places for the evening's safari supper.

The next morning gave us time to visit the old market, the beaches and War Museum before leaving on the evening tide for Ouistreham.

We again had a gentle sail until turning into the channel for Ouistreham Harbour, through Ouistreham lock and onto the canal without needing to use the waiting pontoon but, as expected, a little too late catch the last Pegasus Bridge for Caen.

KiK turned into Ouistreham Marina followed by the rest of the fleet while Shibumi continued up the canal to moor just short of the bridge and take a short walk for coffee at Café Gondree, allegedly the first house to be liberated on D-Day, before joining the fleet back at the marina later that evening.

Awaking on Saturday, still in glorious sunshine the fleet motored south along the 7M canal, passing each bridge in turn, until reaching it's limit in the heart of Caen where we all moored up.



The afternoon was taken up, for some, with a tour the city while others took the train to Bayeux to view the famous Tapestry and visit the old Cathedral.

For the fleet's evening dinner we all met up at the 'Beouf & Cow' in Caen, opposite the Castle, for some very nice pub-food & wine while still finding post-prandial time to enjoy a little more of the city, particularly for those who had used most of the afternoon to visit Bayeaux.

Sunday morning gave us a choice of catching the early bridge towards Ouistreham for a leisurely en-route visit to Pegasus Bridge Memorial Museum or otherwise enjoy the amazing Sunday market nearby with its hundreds of stalls selling clothes, food, drink and various other produce.

After browsing the market for bargains there was just time to catch the midday bridge for a quick 1hr en-route visit to the Pegasus Bridge Museum before locking out of Ouistreham at 4pm.

With a mass of boats steaming out of harbour the fleet put up sail for the 16M trip on a close-reach along the coast to Deauville.

With fair weather, clear skies, moderate seas and the tide underneath us we entered the modern and spacious marina (Bassin Morny being unavailable due to Deauville Yacht Club's hosting of the Annual Normandie Regatta).

Having been on the move every day since leaving St Vaast, a lay-day in stylish Deauville enabled us to chill out in Paris's favourite seaside resort. Here we visited the town and its extensive beaches, the causeway to Trouville, the Casino for lunch (a first for Simon?) and a very pleasant evening fleet dinner at 'Le Drakkar' in the town centre.

Leaving Deauville late Tuesday afternoon in glorious sunshine we made our way to Honfleur with KiK kindly parking their boat temporarily in the channel, just to show the fleet their best route out of the harbour (but maybe we shouldn't mention that!).

The Seine estuary is a lovely expanse of water and although the deep channel along the Chenal de Rouen is narrow and the 'digue' walls need a great deal of respect, the beat up to Honfleur was quite magical. Apart from one or two of the more leisurely boats, we all made it for free-flow through the lock to berth on the long CNH visitor's pontoon alongside the Quai du Jardin Public. Intent on entering the old basin next day we discovered the new CNH members' pontoons were not yet fitted with power and so we all elected to stay outside – quieter and more flexible for getting into the lock the following day.



Honfleur is a wonderfully historic town, very picturesque, thronging with visitors, and especially attractive around the Vieux Bassin with its many restaurants, shops and art galleries. The Jardin Public provided splendid views across the river and views of the Old Lighthouse.

Gareth and Isabelle of 'KiK' had pre-arranged a meal for the lay-day evening at Club CNH (Circle Nautique d'Honfleur) where we were warmly greeted by Commodore Pierre Breton and his wife who treated to a magnificent dinner, including wine, all for a VERY modest price.

Burgees were exchanged and we promised to offer a supplementary venue for CNH's annual regatta with Lymington Town Sailing Club (of which Gareth and Isabelle are reciprocal members).

Departing for Fecamp ahead of the pleasure boats, we left Honfleur early Thursday afternoon to be met by wind over tide and a bumpy sea on our way out of the estuary; but in otherwise fair weather and on a broad reach for most of the rest of the way.

The quiz competition, read out over the VHF (Shibumi had forgotten to hand out the papers before leaving Honfleur, tut-tut) had to be abandoned due to poor reception.

With a strong tide and following wind care was needed not to miss the entrance to Fecamp Harbour.

The marina, located close to the yacht club, was prone to a little but swell we all found berths on the visitor's pontoon without mishap.

Here we toured the famous Palais de Benedictine for an architectural treat and a tasting of the renowned, if somewhat dated, liqueur.



There was a fantastic beach display of kites as part of the local festival and some lovely coastal walks above the town. We enjoyed the yacht club on Friday night where we were entertained with a sausage BBQ and some live-band music.

We had now reached the eastern limit of our journey and the forecast for our cross-channel return promised suggested strengthening winds.



This prompted Cadh' Ruadh, Lacewing and Quickstep to set sail intermittently throughout Saturday for an exciting, if somewhat bumpy, Channel crossing.

Wishing everyone farewell, Cadh' Ruadh was first to cast off - seen attempting submarine manoeuvres in the exit channel while convincing her crew that the sport would be really good and that there was absolutely nothing to fear.

Sure enough, after escaping the bouncy inshore waters, Cadh' Ruadh set canvass and vanished over the horizon for an exhilarating sail all the way to Chichester Harbour, across the bar and up to her home port in Northney.

It is understood that Billie then awoke from a long deep sleep having missed all the excitement.

Meanwhile KiK and Shibumi delayed their crossing until Monday - using the extra day for a short bus trip to Etretat to see this pretty little village with it's longstanding artistic associations (Monet, Courbet & Boudin) and attractive café-culture.

There were fabulous cliff-face views of Elephant Rock (Porte d'Aval), sculpture displays in the private Gardens and a hill-top walk to the 'White Bird' & WWII Memorial sites providing panoramic views of the Cote d'Albatre.



Departing at dawn on Monday, both KiK and Shibumi enjoyed a pleasant sail (augmented by a little motoring) back to Portsmouth to complete the end of a wonderful sailing holiday. Normandy has definitely established itself as a firm favourite for yours truly.

Thank you all for being such good company and especially for the 20yr old bottle of Calvados and Photobook (both very much appreciated!).

Once again - "Nothing broke (this time for sure), nothing fell off and no-one got lost".

Leon Barbour – Cruise Leader ('Shibumi') 2017