

# Cruising Virgins

"Are we really going to go?" It had all seemed such a good idea when we saw Ivan's email back in April. The world was just warming up, spring was in the air and the flowers were beginning to appear. Two days sailing on the sea under a hot July sun with knowledgeable cruisers seemed such a good way to extend our experience into new areas. Now, with the rain pouring down and the wind so strong we had to bring the boat into the garage just to remove the cover and fit the anchor we were not so sure.

"Oh come on, we said we'd go and it would be rude not to show up just because the weather is a bit poor". (A bit poor?) So off we went. All the way down the M6 the rain fell and the wind howled, we could scarcely see the other cars. What were we doing?

"I wonder what it will be like camping in this?" It was nearly a quarter of a century since we last stayed under canvas. We were much younger and there wasn't much choice - we had no money! Since then we had moved on but here we were with a brand new tent that we had never pitched before going to meet people we had never met to sail off shore for the first time.

We must be mad!

But maybe not. As we stopped at the Chester services the sky cleared and the sun came out. Our spirits began to lift. Let the adventure begin. By the time we reached Abersoch it was a beautiful July day, the run down the coast had been perfect and we were really looking forward to the sailing. We met the early arrivals, Sue & Rob, Liz & Josh, who assured us we would enjoy the sailing and pitched our tent, which was far easier and far more comfortable than we remembered (tents have also moved on!) before heading into Abersoch for an excellent meal at the Sandpiper (we can recommend this restaurant to anyone visiting the area!)

Next morning we took our GP, 'Suzy', down to the beach near the sailing club as directed to rig and met up with Oliver & Eddie fitting brand new cruising sails to Oliver's cruising GP. Suzy had been here long before we bought her, to race in the Worlds in 2003, but this would be a different experience, this was very different company. Oliver reassured us we would be fine and gave us some really useful tips - and promised to keep an eye on us out on the sea!

By late morning the tide was with us and we were all on the sea - 3 GPs, 2 Enterprises and 1 Graduate - and reaching up and down. The wind was picking up a bit, even without the kite we were planing easily. Soon we were following Alison and Kev in their Enterprise downwind to our lunch venue - the beach at Llanbedrog. This was marvellous. No more tacking/gybing every few feet - clear skies, blue seas and SPACE! This was magic!



After anchoring for lunch (another experience and another story - we see there are whole books on this subject!) we decided to head out to St Tudwal's islands. What seemed like a good idea in the shelter of the bay looked a lot more difficult as we cleared the headland and the full force of the wind and sea met us. The wind (we later learned) had picked up to a 5/6 and there were now 1 - 1.5m waves! Inevitably we began to separate as we each handled the conditions in our own way, though the RIB kept a wary eye on us all! After 30 minutes of beating into the wind and getting nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way out to our destination we decided the time had come to tack and head for the safety of the shore. Others soon followed, with the RIB ensuring that we all made it safely home. Hard work admittedly but we could scarcely wait for the next day!

On the second day we were joined by a Josh's Mirror (now repaired after a mishap on the way down) and Jane had taken the helm of the Graduate and with a different crew. This left Richard to join those walking round to Llanbedrog with the cricket bat for a game of French cricket on the beach at lunch. Philip & John swapped duties on the RIB too. This time the wind was kinder - Force 2/3 - letting us start by rounding St Tudwal's (East), taking the close passage inside the half tide rock (which was just disappearing as we rounded the island, exactly as Ivan had indicated during the pre-sail briefing) before once again heading to Llanbedrog.



We had a more leisurely lunch, even an ice cream, waiting for the tides to turn and ease our return.





As it was still early we decided to try the outer passage round the islands, via the red bell buoy. Once again the winds rose and the sea got up and it was clear by the time we reached the buoy that the direction also meant we would have to go much further out to make an easy return between the islands while still being confident of clearing the half tide rock. Alison & Kev skilfully heaved to just beyond the buoy to mark our point of return to Abersoch from the far easterly side of the island, back through the moored yachts (no problem!) and the fast moving jet skis (hard to predict!).

All too soon we were de-rigging and packing boats, taking down tents and heading for home. This had indeed been an adventure and as we returned to the rain we had left in Cheshire we said a huge thank you to members of Toddbrook SC and their friends who had invited us to join them, made us so welcome and helped us enjoy an unforgettable two days on the open sea.

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