

# Log for the Trip to Rade de Brest

May 2019

by Colin Le Conte

This blog covers the trip of two boats “Whatever!” and “Echo Beach” to the Rade de Brest in May 2019.



*Echo Beach and Whatever! in Camaret*

The Bay of Saint Malo has many fine marinas available to boaters and so our previous journeys have been to Northern Brittany together with frequent visits to Carteret and Dielette in Normandy. In 2017 we visited Southern Brittany and enjoyed our 10 days there. In 2018 we visited lower Normandy, travelling as far as Honfleur and working back from there.

For 2019 we decided to go to the Rade de Brest. An area we had passed on our way to Southern Brittany in 2017 but not an area we had explored. Indeed, it is a whole cruising ground in its own right and has a number of interesting marinas and rivers. There is good reason this is the home of the French navy with such a vast sheltered area of sea.

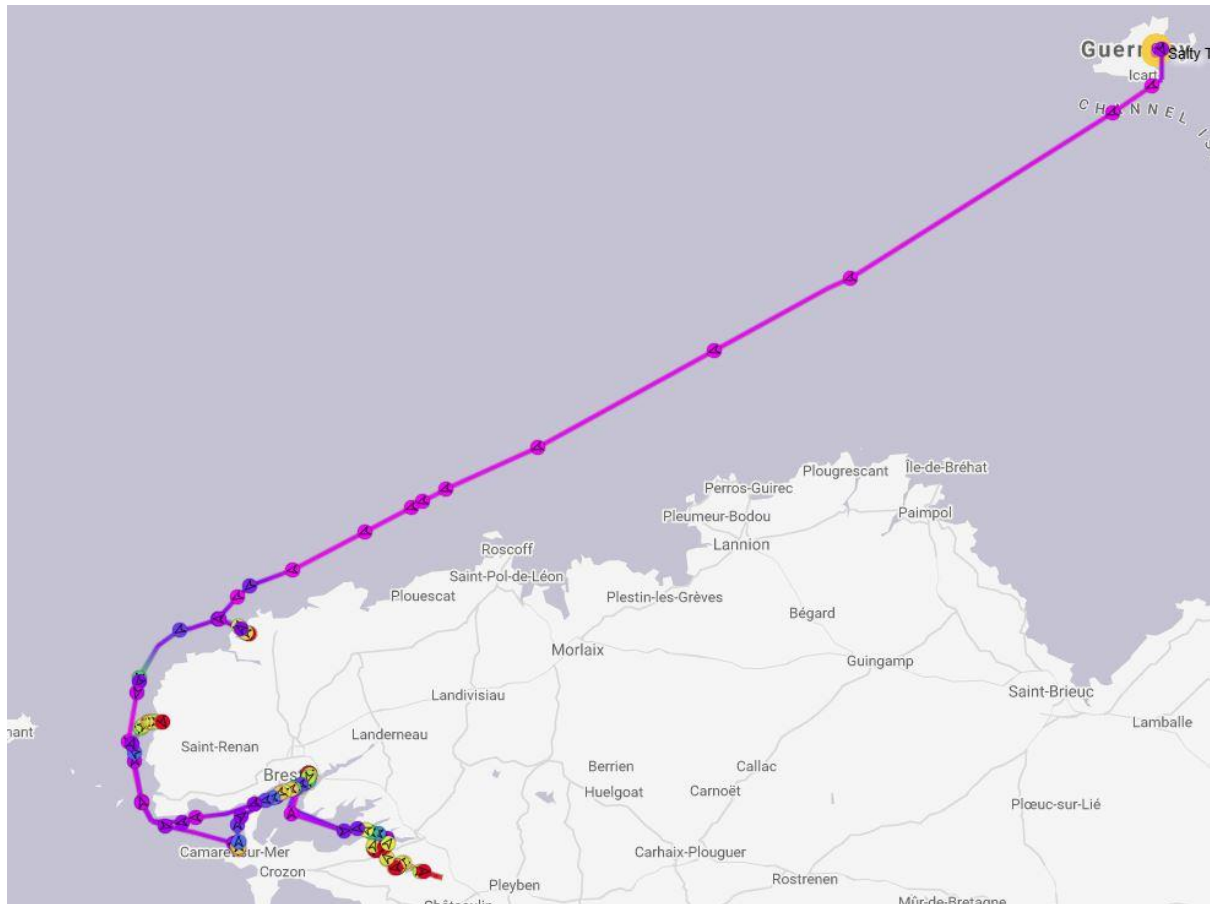
We planned the trip, starting with a long run direct from Guernsey to L’Aber Wrac’h and then a second, shorter run to the Rade de Brest.

## Thursday May 23rd 2019

### Guernsey to L'Aber Wrac'h – 105nm

We left on our trip a couple of days early as the forecast was good for the Thursday in Guernsey and then in western Brittany for the Friday and we were keen to take advantage of the best weather.

We had a good trip to L'Aber Wrac'h in F2 to F3 from the NW, travelling at around 32knots with the benefit of a little tide and so completed the journey in around 3½ hours. If only the sea was always like that.



*The route to L'Aber Wrac'h and Camaret*

We arrived at low water and so used the Libenter Passage which is a bit further but a lot easier to navigate and safer.

L'Aber Wrac'h is a nice, non-tidal marina and has the great benefit of being some 25 to 30nm further west than Roscoff, so makes the timing for "going around the corner" to the Chenal du Four much easier.

We moored on the inside of the breakwater. A couple of yachts moored on the outside but had a lot more disturbance with the passing fishing boats that failed to slow down to a sensible speed to reduce their wake.



*Echo Beach and Whatever! Moored in L'Aber Wrac'h*



*Sunset with a small fishing boat travelling at a sensible speed*



## Friday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2019

### L'Aber Wrac'h to Camaret

We timed the Chenal du Four to reach it at high water and the tidal flow and sea conditions were good. No swell, waves or fog. The passage down was flat, and visibility was good. Timed right and in these conditions, you wonder what all the fuss is about.

We had not been to Camaret on our previous trip as it was full in 2017 due to a yacht race called the "Grand Prix Ecole Navale". It was on again in May / June but we worked around the key dates.

There are 3 marinas in Camaret all of which are non-tidal (available at all tides). The main visitor's marina is the first marina you reach and has a large number of visitors' spaces. Indeed, the marina authorities said that Camaret receives the most visitors of all the marinas in the area, most being for just 1 or 2 nights as they stop off on their long journeys to the north or the south.



*The main visitor's marina*

The visitor's marina has its own marina office and facilities and an interesting 10 to 15min walk to the town, past the old church and the Vauban Tower which is a UNESCO global heritage site.



*Echo Beach and Whatever! Moored in Camaret with the old church and Vauban tower in the background*

The “Tour Vauban” was built to look out for enemy vessels in the Goulet de Brest, where the passage to Brest reduces to less than 1nm wide, and to stop any of them landing in the area around Camaret. The tower has recently been renovated and is well worth a visit.

Closer to the town, the Notic marina can take around 7 visitors boats alongside and 7 boats on fingers, with limited draught. The facilities are shared and basic and it has its own marina office but is convenient to the town.



*The Notic marina office and basic facilities*



*The seafront at Camaret*



## Saturday 25th May 2019

### Camaret

Camaret is a little tired and run down but it grows on you and there are some nice walks around the headland, especially using the GR34 walking route.



*The Vauban Tower, old church and abandoned fishing boats*

We walked north around the coast. It is an interesting area with bomb craters, German fortifications and scenic views. Further around the headland you reach the Manoir de Coecilian which is an old, derelict house where the poet Saint Pol Roux lived and the Alignements Magalithiques de Lagatair druid stones.





*The Alignements Magalithiques de Lagatair*

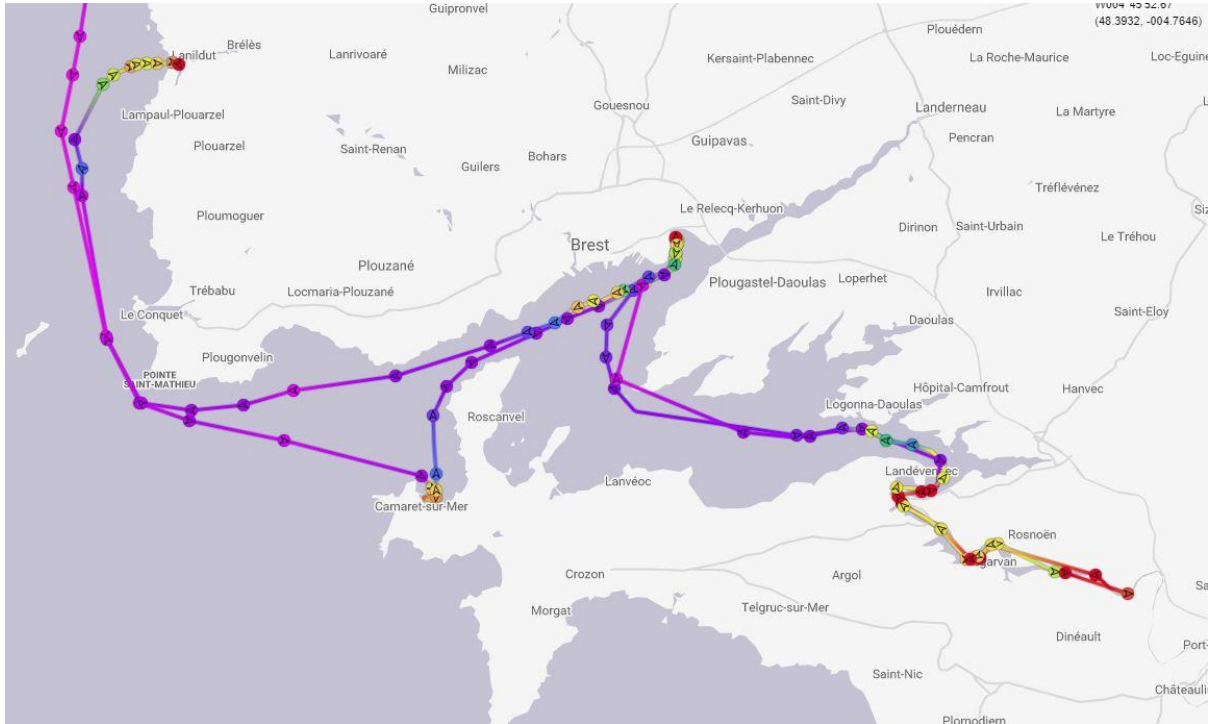
From there, you can walk back down the road back to Camaret in around 12mins.



## Sunday 26th May 2019

### Camaret to Brest – Moulin Blanc – 11nm

We left at 10:00hrs for the short and sheltered trip through the Goulet de Brest to the furthest and oldest Brest marina called Moulin Blanc. It is made up of 2 marinas and the visitors' pontoons are to the north.



*The route to Brest and up the River Aulne*

An easy and well dredged channel, we called up on channel VHF 9 and were met by a helpful marina person who guided us to our places. You can moor inside of the breakwater or on the pontoon towards the fuelling by the marina office. We were provided with good moorings although the one for Echo Beach was tight with only 1ft clearance at the bow and stern.



The marina office is very helpful and the facilities are good. You even get a welcome pack.





*The Harbour office and facilities*

Right next to the marina is Oceanopolis which is a famous and very good aquarium although some sections are a little dated.



*Oceanopolis*



*The Harbour office with Oceanopolis on the left*

Monday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Brest – Moulin Blanc

There is an easy and convenient bus journey to the City of Brest. A 20min trip on the regular no 3 bus, we got off at the railway station and explored all of the City. Although it was rebuilt after the war, it is a pleasant city with wide streets, a nice cathedral and some interesting places to visit.

Top of the list was the Chateaux which contains an interesting museum.



*Inside the Chateaux Museum*

We also had a good look around the Chateau marina which is the newer marina, set between the naval base and the large commercial area.



*Chateau marina visitors pontoons on the left and middle. Some facilities on the pontoon*



The visitors moorings are along the breakwater and they have now added an additional visitors pontoon, with some facilities on the pontoon, a bit like Roscoff and Cherbourg. But it is quite a long walk to the marina office, the on-shore facilities and the restaurants.



*Chateau marina office and main facilities*

It is rather separated from the Town and a 20 minute walk to the train station. Based on this, our good moorings at Moulin Blanc and the weather forecast, we decided we would stay in the Moulin Blanc marina while in Brest rather than moving marinas for a couple of days.

We hired a car from Europcar near the Railway station.

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Brest – Moulin Blanc

We travelled by car west to Pointe Sainte Mathieu. We had seen the lighthouse and the ruined abbey from the sea when travelling through the Chenal du Four, but it was even more interesting on land.

There is a church, ruined abbey, semaphore building and the lighthouse, all within a few metres of each other.



*The ruined abbey and Saint Mathieu lighthouse*





*The semaphore building, ruined abbey and lighthouse*

Just a couple of miles away there is a new WWII museum which only opened in 2017 and is set in German watchhouse bunkers and is an excellent display. Everything is in French and English and was created by 2 brothers. Well worth a visit.

We returned via Le Conquet which is a harbour to the north but no marina. This is the main port for the ferries to Ushant and Ile Molene although they do go from Brest as well (via Le Conquet).

## Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019

### Brest – Moulin Blanc – visit to Port Launay and Quimper

We had always planned to visit Quimper while in the Brest area. When we went up the Odet river, north of Benodet in 2017, we got close, but boat access stops around 1nm from the start of the town and there is nowhere convenient to leave your boat for the day.

We had planned to go by train from Brest (1 hour) or Chateaulin (20mins) but as we had a hire car, we drove.

We took the opportunity to do a recce of Guilly Glaz lock, Port Launay and Chateaulin on the Rover Aulne. We also visited the picturesque town of Locronan, reputed to be one of the prettiest villages in Brittany.



*The town of Locronan*



Quimper is great and a lovely old town. It was not bombed during the war so retains its original architecture. A nice river, good architecture and impressive church. Well worth a visit.



Our visit was planned to coincide with the large Wednesday market – the “Grand Marche” as it is called. Sadly, there were only 4 stalls and the Tourist office explained they only get the 100+ stalls in the summer months of July and August.



*The not so “Grand Marche”*

## Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019

### Brest – Moulin Blanc return from Quimper - visit to River Aulne

We returned from Quimper to Moulin Blanc marina. Fast roads all the way and the journey took less than an hour.

We took the car back to Europcar near the Brest train station, but despite assurances they would be open, they were closed due to the French holiday that day as were most of the shops.

The bendy bus took us back to Moulin Blanc at great speed, a journey of only 15mins

The forecast for the Friday afternoon was F4 to F5 from the South and had we gone up the river to Port Launay, the earliest lock time for the return journey would have meant leaving the Guilly Glaz lock gate in the early afternoon and exiting the River Aulne at around 16:00hrs. The tide in the Chenal du Four would have been running strongly from the North and with a Southerly wind, we would have had wind against tide, the wrong tide conditions and some 80nm to go. Treating the passage with its well-deserved respect, we decided an overnight stay at Port Launay was not ideal and so we decided to go up the River Aulne as a day trip on "Whatever!".

I have combined the information on the River Aulne trip with the recce visit we did the previous day to provide a better guide for anyone planning this trip.

We left Brest marina around 2.5 hours before High Water and it was 11nm to the start of the River Aulne. The plan was to get to the bridge around 2 hours before HW so you will need to plan your leaving time accordingly.

You go around some tight bends and then see the old, derelict fleet of war ships. Impressive and creepy.



*One of the warships comes into view*

When you reach the bridge, (which recently won the award for the most beautiful concrete bridge), you call the Guilly Glaz lockkeeper on 02.98.86.03.21 and inform him of your expected arrival time. He only operates 2 hours either side of HW and between set hours during the day so do check the timings.





*The most beautiful concrete bridge*

At Mean Spring Neap tides (45% coefficient) they say you should have 2.5m draught all the way to the lock, provided you stay to the deepest water. If you are a tall yacht, you will need to check your air draught as well. The last 1nm is the shallowest.

The Gully Glaz lock is the highest lock for most boats and is quite big. Be careful not to move across the river to the lock until you are quite close, or you may go aground.

The [www.smatah.fr](http://www.smatah.fr) website provides useful information.



*Gully Glaz lock – looking downstream*



*GUILY GLAZ lock looking upstream*

Through the bridge and above the lock is Port Launay which is a nice small town. There is a Town hall, but the building you want is further downriver. It sells the tokens for your electric and your water.



*The marina building. Tokens / jetons available outside*



At Chateaulin, there is supposed to be a pontoon for visitors, but it was in a poor state and could only take 2 yachts.



*Chateaulin pontoon*

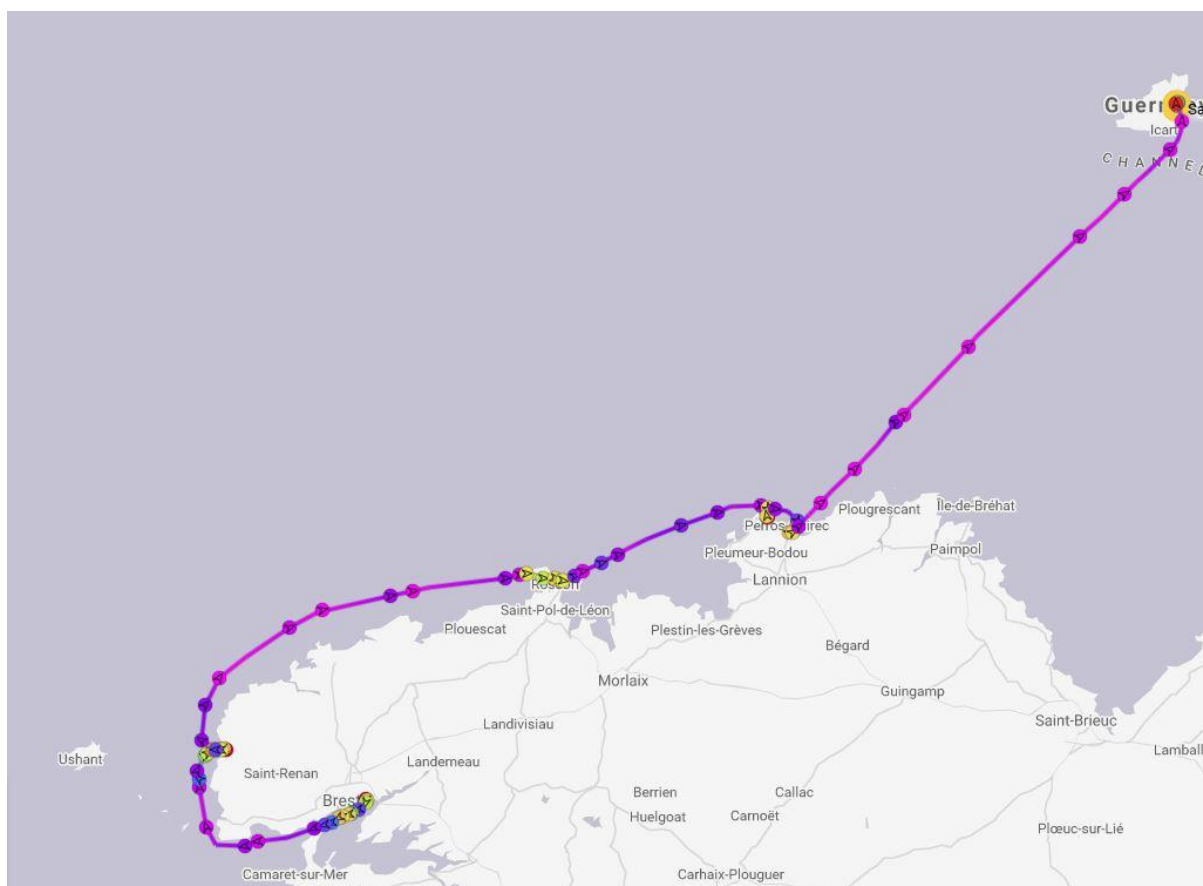
On the way back down the river we were greeted by a yacht race from the bridge to the sea. Quite a sight.



We returned to Moulin Blanc marina and refuelled Echo Beach ready for the return trip.

# Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019

## Brest Moulin Blanc to L'Aber Ildut to Ile de Batz to Ploumanach to Perros Guirec



### *The return trip*

We left Moulin Blanc marina first thing in the morning at around low water. There was a fog a few feet above us which thickened by the time we got to the Brest Chateau marina and took the visibility down to a few metres. As a result, our planned quick visit to Chateau marina to take some photos of the entrance the Digimap marinas web site was cancelled.

We travelled 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the way up the Chenal du Four in great conditions. The wind was F3 from the South and the 1.5 knots of tide was also from the South. Wind with tide is always best (or no wind and no tide!).

The conditions were good enough to visit L'aber Ildut. An interesting port which had some visitors pontoons added mid 2018 and is not covered as a marina in any of the books. So we made our visit and loved the place.







*Following a fishing boat into L'Aber Ildut*



*L'Aber Ildut's new "marina"*

Although small, it is really interesting and there was lots going on with the seaweed being passed from the fully laden boats to the awaiting trucks. No wonder it is the seaweed capital of Brittany.





*Boats full of seaweed, collected at low tide*

We had lunch on board the boats, took lots of photos and carried on with our journey, timing it right for the Ile de Batz inside passage at around half tide. We had always wanted to go through the inside of the island passage as it is shorter, more scenic and avoids the meeting of tides in the outside passage, but is not recommended at low water.



*The walkway to the ferries from Roscoff to Ile de Batz*

A large swell was running from the West and so was behind us. At up to 2m high, it had a “wave period” of around 14 seconds which represents a long swell. Fine going with the swell but not so comfortable travelling in the opposite direction as it is surprising how fast the swell moves. In deep water, swell travels at around 1.5 times the wave period so a 14 second swell travels at around 21mph. At 28 knots we were faster than the waves by 11mph. Going the other way we would have been meeting the waves at 53mph!

Passing Roscoff, we headed for the inlet of Ploumanac’h. Another port on our bucket list. We had visited by land a couple of times and were keen to visit by sea. We had no intention of staying overnight on the fore and aft moorings, so a quick visit was ideal.





*The entrance to Ploumanac'h*

The ferries thought the same and we had one follow us in and met another near the exit. A beautiful inlet.



*Inside Ploumanac'h*

We went around to Perros Guirec and arrived 20 mins after the gate opened. The tide can rush in through the gate until the wall is covered and 20mins after gate opening proved to be ideal timing.

The gate at Perros Guirec is only 5.8m wide and feels narrower as you approach the entrance.

The pontoons are named, and the visitor's pontoon is the second from the right, called La Mutine.



Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019

Perros Guirec

We walked up the hill to the main town and explored the area. It is a nice Town with lots of shops, a small church and the Tourist Information. The main beach is the other side of the Town.





Sadly this was the only day the shops were open with almost all of them being closed on the Sunday and the same on the Monday.

Walking back along the GR34 route around the coast, we walked past a smaller beach and around the headland. An interesting walk with some good views of the route we took in, passing to the west of Ile Tome (in the distance).



Some 60 yachts arrived from the Guernsey to Perros Guirec yacht race that evening. They were all French and the place was a hive of chaos and activity for a few hours.

The harbour office is across the road, but quite well located and the facilities are at the back of the building. There appears to be a small information office on the right, but it was always closed.



## Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2019

### Perros Guirec

The next morning, we got up and quiet as a mouse, all the racing yachts had gone. Off on the next leg of their race, last seen heading for Roscoff.

We took a taxi to the main beach (about Euro 18) and caught the ferry to visit the Sept Isles. There are actually 5 islands (not 7) due to a translation error – we were told!

The “Armor Navigation” skipper was skilled and went very close to some rocks.



Amazing to see all the wildlife including Gannets, Puffins, Seals.

They will also take you into Ploumanac’h if the tide is high enough.





This is a popular trip and well worth going on at least once. In the summer (July and August), they do ferries to the Isle de Brehats which would be interesting.



*Lots of Gannets*

## Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019

### Perros Guirec

We walked from Perros Guirec to the beach (30mins) and then a beautiful walk around the GR34 route to Ploumanac'h. This was a very scenic 1 hour section which is highly recommended. Easy walking and pretty flay with amazing views of the pink granite and neatly perched rocks.



*The pink granite coast*

At Ploumanach we visited the sculpture park and caught the bus back to Perros. The TiBus has been replaced by a TILT bus and in May only operated 3 times a day. There is a smaller bus that operates in the summer (mid July to August) which would help with short journeys such as going up the hill to the main town in Perros.



## Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2019

### Perros Guirec to Guernsey – 53nm

The forecast was for the wind to increase on Wednesday and then decrease on Thursday morning and then Storm Miguel would come through on Friday and Saturday which included F8 to F9 gusts.

If the weather came earlier or the forecast for Thursday increased, we could be stuck for a few days, so having done everything we planned, we decided to head for home.

We left at 09:00 French time and this allowed enough time to leave the marina and get back to Guernsey before the QEII closed with time to spare. There was a 1.5m following swell and good speed was made at 29knots for the whole journey and taking under 2 hours.



*Whatever! Leaving Perros Guirec*

## Boats

### Echo Beach



A Princess V39 with Volvo Penta D6-330hp engines.

Colin's Princess was built in Plymouth in 2016 – see <http://www.princess.co.uk/boat/princess-v39/>

### Whatever!



A Princess V42 mk2 with Volvo Penta D6-370hp engines.

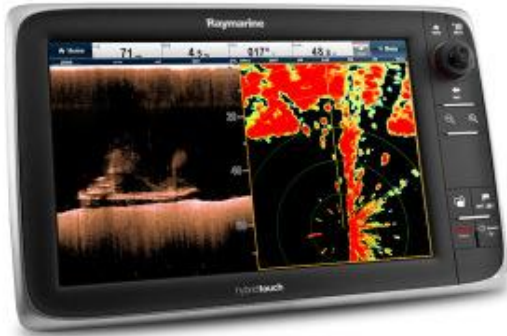
David's Princess was built in 2008 – see <http://www.princess.co.uk/>



## Equipment used

In addition to the charts, compass, flares, liferaft, EPIRB, DSC radio, radar reflector, backup GPS and backup radio we are using the following technologies.

Colin is using the latest Raymarine v19 Lighthouse II software on the Raymarine E125 Chart plotter. It has an external and internal GPS antenna, EV1 heading sensor, autopilot and i70 screens.



The courses have been plotted using the excellent and highly recommended Navigation Planner software v7.19 which uses the Navionics charts. This exports to an SD card in Raymarine format.



The Navionics charts are the latest Navionics+ and cover the vast area from the Netherlands to Morocco and goes as far as Italy and Corsica. The chart is called 46XG Central and West Europe.

- Raymarine E125 Charplotter using Navionics charts with May 2019 chart updates
- AIS transponder and receiver
- Raymarine digital HD radar
- Raymarine DSC VHF radio
- Navigation Planner PC software with Navionics Charts
- NV Chart Books – containing all paper-based charts of the area including detailed harbour charts
- Various Charts covering the whole area
- WiFi repeater with “3” SIM card 24gb for 24 months
- TripAdvisor
- Vodaphone SIM which works in 40 countries
- Windguru pro
- Windfinder Pro
- Backup systems
  - Navionics HD App for android running on tablet and mobile phone
  - Icom VHF handheld radio
- Safety systems inc liferaft, EPIRB, flares, electric flare, AIS transponder, radar reflector, DSC VHF radio

## Facts and Figures

### Distances and fuel

Name	Distance	Time	Echo Beach Fuel estimate (litres)	Whatever! Fuel estimate (litres)
Guernsey to L'Aber Wrac'h	103nm	3:30	342	335
L'Aber Wrac'h to Camaret	35nm	1:30	112	110
Camaret to Moulin Blanc	11nm	0:30	33	31
Moulin Blanc to River Aulne return	46nm (20nm at slow speed)	4:00	none	116
Moulin Blanc to Perros Guirec	98	5:00	290	280
Perros Guirec to Guernsey	55nm	1:50	176	170
<b>Total</b>	<b>nm</b>		<b>953 litres</b>	<b>1,042 litres</b>

### Refuelling

Name	Echo Beach	Whatever!
Moulin Blanc	497 litres	476 litres
Boatworks+	474 litres	556 litres
<b>Total</b>	<b>971 litres</b>	<b>1,032 litres</b>

### Marina costs

Our boats are 12m long and there was an interesting difference in the price of the marinas.

Name	Nights	Cost
L'Aber Wrac'h	1	Euro 32.50 a night
Camaret	2	Euro 29.00 a night
Moulin Blanc	5	Euro 35.10 a night
Perros Guirec	4	Euro 39.00 a night (3 <sup>rd</sup> night free)



## What we learnt

The Rade de Brest is a great area and not too far from the Channel Islands or indeed the South West coast of England.

The Chenal du Four demands respect but timed correctly and with the right weather conditions is fine.

The forecasts were very changeable with lots of lows and fronts and so we could only plan a couple of days ahead. We had to be flexible with our planning.

The River Aulne is well worth exploring but you have to make special arrangements to travel above Chateaulin. Your boat also needs to be of a suitable size.

There is not much to choose between Moulin Blanc and Chateau marina. We liked Moulin Blanc but there were limited good places to eat.

## Advert!

Should you require any further information on the marinas, please do not hesitate to visit <http://marinas.digimap.gg/> and do tell your boating friends.

