

WOTAN'S LOG FOR DISTRIBUTION 5TH May 2008

Hi all,

Once again Wotan has taken to the high seas, I cannot claim that this time it is an ocean, but rather the North Sea and the Baltic. This log covers a two week period, rather than the more usual week, and will inevitably win disapproval from 'her indoors' because of its length. Digger Harris and Douglas Byatt, who sailed from the Azores to Ireland with me last year rejoined the crew. Alison Miller, whom I have known for many a long year, joined us to make up our ideal compliment of four.

On Sunday 27th April we weighed anchor in the dawn light. We motored out to sea and eastwards up Channel. At 1151 we crossed the Greenwich meridian and passed into the Eastern Hemisphere. Sailing past Dover we were amazed at the volume of traffic coming and going. We spent the night in Ramsgate after an altercation with an unfriendly dredger. Ramsgate boasts a handsome 19th century brick built roadway down to its not insubstantial harbour.

From Ramsgate we headed across the North Sea to Texel. The southern North Sea is a magnet for shipping of all kinds, so we had to avoid the traffic lanes and keep a careful watch on the radar. Dawn saw us some 50 miles off den Helder. We reached the den Helder fairway buoy at 1530, but as the tide was whooshing out of the den Helder channel, it took us a further three hours to cover the remaining 12 miles to Oudeschild where we planned to moor for the night. The local beer Dubbels is to be recommended. Order a double Dubbels and you won't go far wrong! Wednesday was the Queen's birthday. The older children were busking, while others were selling their surplus toys on makeshift stalls.

We had planned to leave Texel on Tuesday evening but the forecast was horrid so we delayed our departure until the next morning. We had an over night sail to Bunsbittel at the mouth of the Elbe, where we entered the Kiel Kanal, built by Kaizer Wilhelm to speed his Imperial Fleet into the North Sea to challenge the Brits. The canal is a fine feat of engineering. It is 60 miles long and with a maintained depth of 11 metres. Quite respectable sea going vessels use the canal, so we spent a fair amount of time dodging them! The canal is shut to pleasure craft after lights out, so we anchored 10 miles from Kiel in the Flemhuder See. To call it a sea is rather overstating the case, but it was very attractive nonetheless. We decided that as we were within spitting distance of the Baltic, celebration was the order of the evening. Digger broached a magnum of Chateau Bel-Air, a terroir owned by the Serrey-Eiffel family which is directly related to Gustav Eiffel of Eiffel tower fame. We woke to thick fog to hear huge ocean going vessels thumping past only a few yards from our thankfully protected anchorage!

Kiel is the Cowes of northern Germany. As it was the weekend, yachts were racing to and fro and there was a general air of festivity. We passed the imposing U-Boat memorial as we sailed out. We had a long passage to Christianso ahead of us. On Sunday morning I came on watch to see a square rigger heading for us. It was a beautiful German sail training vessel called Odin. So Odin meets Wotan. I am not an expert in German mythology, but I am sure there could have been trouble! Trouble

there was because at about this time I noticed we were being shadowed by a German coastguard vessel. Sure enough it launched its RIB, described later by its crew as 'my little lifeboat', which headed straight for us! Not again I said to myself, why is it always me?! Anyhow we were boarded by armed German police who were impeccably polite and asked for our passports, which were examined by a shifty looking number who was clearly taking no chances with Alison's passport, quite rightly in my view! The boss then asked me if we had more than Euro 15,000 in cash or other valuables, a chance would be a fine thing, I replied. They all hopped back into their RIB driven by an Arnold Schwartznegger look alike, but not before the shifty number had almost fallen into the sea! We arrived at Christianso very late that night. The entrance and the harbour were tiny so we rather enjoyed nosing our way in and tying up on the fishing dock, in this picture postcard harbour. In the morning we walked around the two islands, which had provided a base for the Danish navy and less happily a penal colony. The Danish kings of the 18th century were not quite as liberal as their successors might wish you to believe!

We were now into cruising mode. Our next port was Karlskrona, the home of the Swedish navy. Back in 1987 a Russian submarine grounded on the submerged breakwater at the entrance. I can sympathise since the locals only turn the break water lights on well after dark! Karlskrona boasts a maritime museum which in the words of the Guide Michelin is 'vaut le voyage'. Beside the museum is a shed where shipwrights were building classic scandinavian wooden boats, where we spent a happy half hour waiting for the museum to open.

We sailed on up the coast to Kalmar, where again we arrived late at night. Kalmar commands the narrows in the Kalmarsund and boasts a fairytale castle. In the morning we sailed under the Oland bridge and up the Kalmarsund to an anchorage in the Blue Coast archipelago. The next day we sailed further up the coast to another little anchorage which we found in a local pilot book, written in Swedish. We decided to ignore the instructions and to concentrate on the chartlet! We bumped the bottom on occasions, but as I always say, if you do not run aground you are not really trying! The next day was a day of classic rock pilotage up to Oxelosund, where we were to change crews. The passage was an accepted one. Don't try to make passages up yourself as you will surely come to grief, follow the accepted routes. The passage could be made in the dark as it is marked by sectored light houses, though none of the buoys are lit. The passage was really fun, though it required everyone to keep their eyes skinned. We had three pairs of binoculars and a chartplotter going. We needed all of them! We stopped for lunch in a tiny anchorage as we in need of a rest before heading on to Oxelosund, our final destination. To make matters worse, Sweden is built on iron ore deposits so the compass variation changes all the time. The chart has encouraging notes to the effect that compass variation can be up to + or - 60 degrees! Great, but which way!!

We arrived in Oxelosund on Friday 9th May. Alison and Digger left us on Saturday and Douglas on Sunday. On Sunday, I was joined by Michel van Biers and his son Christopher for the final leg up to Saltsjobaden near Stockholm. The weather was incredibly warm as we sailed round Landsort, the entrance to the southern channel up to Stockholm. We spent the night in a tiny anchorage on the island of Musko, before a tough beat up to Dalaro and finally a motor to Salsjobaden as the channel was so

narrow we did not have a hope of beating up it. The Stockholm archipelago is every bit as beautiful as it is made out to be.

Further installments will come after Midsummer's night's eve!

Good sailing, from

Ant an all on Wotan