

WOTAN'S LOG

RIGA - OXELOSUND 28th June to 12th July 2009

I apologise for being so slow in sending off this log. There are three more to come, so stand by your beds! As usual I have been told that the log is too long, so I remind you again that you do have a delete button on your computer.

Bim and John Marrett arrived at Riga on Sunday 28th June after a somewhat eventful flight. I plied them with dinner at the yacht club to celebrate their arrival. They spent Monday exploring Riga, finishing up in the market by the railway station, where they bought copious quantities of the local delicacies.

We had planned to sail to Ruhnu on Tuesday, but the wind was such that we would have had to beat there. We therefore cut our losses and headed for Roja, pronounced Roy-ya, for those with a naughty turn of mind. We had the most wonderful sail on a close fetch at 6-7 knots under blues skies and on a calm sea. The yacht pontoon is right up at the western end of the port, just below a road bridge. The pilot book promised a minimum depth of 3m at the yacht berth, but this was not to be. As usual we ran aground several metres off the pontoon. We just managed to push our way through the mud onto the pontoon. Roja is a fishing and fishing boat repair harbour with many boats undergoing repair.

After we managed to extricate ourselves from the mud next morning, we encountered a stream of fishing boats returning to Roja to off load their catch. We motored all the way to Ruhnu, in a flat calm. I was pleased to be back in Ruhnu, but disappointed that Bim considered it to be a smelly malaria infested swamp! Later in the evening, she relented of this view, announcing that she liked the place after all!

On Thursday morning we set off for Kuresaare under a clear blue sky and a light westerly wind. By noon we had the main and No 3 genoa set and we were heading up the east coast of Ruhnu. As we reached the Roomasaare fairway buoy in the late afternoon, the breeze died and we motored or rather bumped our way into Kuresaare once again! We were welcomed by the harbour master who was very pleased to see us again. We decided to have lay day in Kuresaare, what more attractive place. In the morning, John kindly helped me to replace two stanchions and the guardrails on the starboard side. After our exertions, we decided to treat ourselves to lunch at the Boston Restoran, which was just beside the harbour master's office. The owner was an American, whom, I was reliably informed, had been in the FBI. John and I shared a seafood platter, which was delicious.

As we had an early start in the morning and as we had been so taken by the Boston Restoran, we returned there for dinner. Our big discovery was Saaremaa vodka which was some of the best I had ever tasted. After dinner, John went on a quest for supplies of Saaremaa vodka. Unfortunately, the off licence was shut so he persuaded the waitresses in the restaurant to sell him two bottles, much to her amusement. We settled down to sample some more vodka!

On Saturday morning reveille was at 0630 so that we could cover the 65 miles to Ventspils by 1800 to meet Peter Bentley. We slipped our moorings and bumped and ground our way down the channel to the fairway

buoy in bright sunshine. We only saw three yachts and three merchantmen on the way to Ventspils. We docked at the Ventspils YC marina, where the harbour master kindly offered to drive me to the local patrol station to refill my fuel can. While there were a number of attractive and well built houses in the area, most of the houses and flats had been very shoddily built. There was park near the marina full well designed kit for children to play on. I was left with the feeling that Latvia has been less successful in developing its infrastructure than the neighbouring Estonia.

Peter arrived at 2130 having traveled from Riga on the Ventspils Express, which runs but once a day. The line was single track with passing places. The train stopped periodically to allow goods trains carrying oil to pass. In a number of sidings were old tank cars that had caught fire had been abandoned. There was not a morsel of food to be had on the train, so Peter was famished by the time he arrived. We had dinner and repaired to bed as we had a very early start on Sunday morning.

John very nobly offered to get up at 0300 to help me get Wotan under way. There was no wind so we could take our time tidying up the deck. Peter came on deck to record the event for posterity as we motored into the main harbour and out to sea. Within a short time the wind got up and we had the No.3 genoa pulling. I took the first watch until 0530 and John took the following watch until 0700. When he turned off the engine we were still doing 7 knots. Bim came on watch at 0700 for an hour and was followed by Peter. The sea was quite rough giving us a nasty motion, which left both Bim and John feeling none too good. It was 85 miles from Ventspils to Fårösund on Gotland. We had up to 25 knots across the deck, so all in all it was a fairly rugged passage. Peter excelled himself by doing everyone's watches. John began to recover as we closed Fårösund. At 1430 we sighted the Södergrund SCM. We were moored up in Fårösund marina by 1550, but not before we had bumped a rock just off the first berth we attempted to enter. Fårösund is a small town from which the ferry goes to the island of Fårö about a mile across the sound. Fårö is famous because Ingmar Bergmann spent the last 20 years of his life living there.

The forecast for Monday was for rain all day. It was not wrong. We sailed and motored down the west coast of Gotland to Visby, taking it in turns to get soaking wet. We had a minor altercation with two fast ferries that did their best to run us down! There were no berths in the main Gasthamn so we headed over to the overflow berths on the North West sea wall, which were a lot quieter.

We had planned a lay day in Visby to visit the Hanseatic city. Fortunately, the weather had improved massively. Visby is very beautiful, with many churches and a Powder Tower, which is reputed to be the oldest secular building in Scandinavia. We had lunch in town before repairing to Wotan to meet Michel and Anne van Biers and their daughter Astrid. They were coming over to his godson's 40th birthday party. The van Biers arrived on the 1415 ferry and were soon on board. They had brought quantities of cake for us all to eat. We had a most enjoyable early tea sitting in the cockpit before they had to head off to the party. John and Peter very kindly gave Bim & me dinner at the Backfiken restaurant in the main square. It was delicious.

At 0940 on Wednesday morning we slipped the fuel berth. There was little or no wind but it was sunny. So it was with light hearts that we set course for Västervik, about 55 miles away, the first 45 miles of which were in the open sea. Gradually the sky clouded over and the wind picked up so that by 1445 we were able to turn off the motor and sail at between 6 and 7 knots. We picked up Fyrken a port hand mark, marking the southern channel into Västervik, at 1630. I had chosen a route which took us through the Spårösund, which is a mere 40 metres wide! We tried to find a berth in the town Gasthamn, but the Västervik Music Festival was due to start on the morrow so all the berths were taken. We headed to the Wikings SC marina. The harbour master was very friendly and relieved us of a mere SEK140, our cheapest mooring fee to date. He offered to do rape and pillage for a small extra fee! Apparently Västervik's inhabitants had had to move up the fjord to Gambleby because of the depredations of the Danish Vikings, only returning to the original site of Västervik many years later. We commiserated with the harbour master, who told us all this. I said that we too had had a lot of problems with the damned Danish Vikings! On the way into Västervik for dinner, we passed the Gasthamn where there was a café playing music very loudly, so we were glad we had not found a berth there. Västervik is an important commercial centre. We found a restaurant overlooking the Gamblebyviken that leads up to Gambleby 12 miles further inland.

Thursday morning dawned pretty miserable as we had expected, though Bim's iPhone promised better weather in the afternoon, albeit with stronger winds. Bim, John and Peter set off in to town to do the shopping, while I stayed aboard pleading weak knees and ship's business to do. They returned triumphant having found both a good supermarket and lunch. Meanwhile the wind blew and the rain came. Our evening was lightened up by a small motor boat skippered by a very competent 25 year old girl, with a delightfully incompetent crew intent, on hitting the Västervik Music Festival.

We were planning to spend the night in a "troll" anchorage and to enjoy a day's sailing along the coast. The wind was in the southwest. After yesterday's rain, everybody on Västervik was anxious to get on with their holiday and some sailing. There was a stream of yachts coming out of Västervik heading north with us. The wind was about F5 so we set the genoa, enough for us oldies and sped north. I had spotted an anchorage in the pilot book at Batsviken, which, since I have a Bat Cave at home for my office, seemed to be a good place to stop for lunch. The long bay ran northwest-southeast and was protected by a bluff at its southern entrance. This I felt should make a good anchorage in a southwest wind. We anchored there at 1315 and had a rather rolly lunch. We tried to have a post prandial snooze as is the custom on Wotan, when coasting, but the wind had got up and was funnelling down the bay. There was an ominous grating sound so we all decided that if we were not dragging already, we would be soon. We weighed anchor and motored out. We soon had the genoa out and we were sailing up the channel. We came across a motor sailor aground, but before we could offer and assistance the lifeboat appeared to tow them off.

Rather unimaginatively, I chose to go back to Boko where I had anchored last year. Boko, which had been empty in early May last year, was full of yachts. Most had tied themselves to a ring or a tree and dropped a stern anchor. We dropped anchor in the bay near a German yacht. The bay

was beautifully sheltered. We had a delightful dinner and a peaceful night at anchor.

We weighed anchor at 1055 and headed on up the inner channel northwards. The anchor came up covered in a fine white mud, which Peter assured me was glacial mud. We were able to sail all the way under genoa, in true middle-aged fashion. We stopped for lunch at the tiny anchorage of Ormöarna, where I had stopped for lunch the previous year on the way up to Stockholm. After lunch we sailed on up to Arkösund, where I had hoped to moor in the yacht club marina. There was a racing series in progress so we soon decided that we would have to go to the main Gasthamn. This was full, though there was an ominously empty outside pontoon with finger berths. We had an interesting entrance enlivened by my own incompetence! Once we had moored up, the pontoon soon filled up. We were told that the café at the camping site served the best chips in the east of Sweden, so that was where we headed.

On Sunday morning we had a gentle motor sail up to Oxelosund, hugging the south coast of the mainland. As we came into the Oxelosund Gasthamn, we spotted Galliard of Lymington RCC moored on the outer pontoon. WE moored beside her. Richard and Chris Waters kindly invited us aboard for drinks before we headed off to the airport. Lotta, the harbour mistress kindly gave us a lift to the airport and promised to pick us up when we returned. We had a remarkably good dinner in the departure lounge. We flew back to Stansted and went to stay with the Bentleys.

Ant Fawcett
29th August 2009