

The Channel Islands log of *Louisa* by Alison Pearce

The Yarmouth 23 owners have various amounts of experience from the novice cruiser sailor to the very experienced. Having formed a group, we keep in touch with useful tips to learn more about our boat and we also like to get together a couple of times a year for a sail. After our discussion lunch in February this year we decided that our challenge for 2004 was to sail across the English Channel.

Our trip began with our regular rendez-vous at the Old Gaffers Festival in Yarmouth on the weekend of June 23rd. Apart from the socialising and catching up with the other Y23 owners, the highlight of the weekend was the Y23 race on the Sunday morning. It was held mainly for David Lemonius to take some publicity shots but for the more competitive amongst us it was a chance to prove their worth! The turn out for the race was excellent – the participants being Tarka, Freebooter, Louisa, Hecate, Eremue, Jabiru, and the brand new Finlandia, number 23. We had some hairy moments where the more gentlemanly crews didn't use the starboard rule but got rather close anyway! There was a strong tide against us so getting to the last buoy was a ferry gliding exercise and Louisa, having to tack round, was pipped at the post (or buoy), by Freebooter who got the angle just right and rounded it at the last moment!

The first leg towards the Channel Islands began on the Monday (the 7th), destination Studland Bay. Having gone over to Lymington the night before, we on Louisa left there at lunchtime and waited out in the Solent for Freebooter to join us. Lo Shu (our honorary Y23 group member being a Folk boat) was due to meet us just outside Lymington but had got held up outside Cowes by light winds. We went out through the North Channel following Freebooter and passed very close to the beach. With David being very experienced we were assured he knew the area extremely well whereas if we had been by ourselves we would have probably taken that a bit wider! Unfortunately, although there was a strong tide with us, the wind died down to F1 eventually so we had to put the engine on. Tarka was waiting for us when we arrived in Studland Bay as their home is in Poole harbour and they had returned there the previous day. Earlier in the day we had discussions on the best place to anchor for the night – if the wind had been from the East we would have been unable to anchor in the Studland Bay as the boats would have rolled about too much. However as the winds were light it wasn't too much of an issue and Studland Bay was the best anchorage point in terms of leaving the next morning as it cuts off an hour of the journey. So we anchored up there on what was a fabulous sunny evening.

Tuesday 8th at 4.15 am and the sun was just rising as we raised our anchors to depart for Alderney. The planet Venus was crossing the face of the sun and Tony on Lo Shu had a smoked glass device to see it and Geoff and Jaye (on Tarka) attempted to look it with 2 pairs of sunglasses. It was a beautiful morning with hardly any wind and what wind there was, was due south which was our course. Consequently for first 6 hours we motored and everyone kept together. As we were making good time though we did put a tack in so we were able to sail. Geoff was able to make contact with Eremue (who was joining us directly from Yarmouth) as his VHF radio seemed to have a longer range. At about 11 am we came into some fog and the wind came up. We put in one reef and then decided it would be safer to put in two. We kept Freebooter in sight but unfortunately we lost Tarka and Lo Shu. (Later that evening at the debrief we found out that actually Tarka had trouble bringing down the topsail but as we were busy at the time we hadn't heard

them). We were all still in radio contact though, which was reassuring as it was quite scary how quickly we lost sight of the others with the visibility being so poor. As we were getting nearer to the shipping lanes about an hour later it was agreed that it would be safer to turn back and head for Weymouth as it was really too dangerous to continue. Geoff tried to get hold of Eremue to let them know but unfortunately was unable to contact them. After we had turned back we eventually came out of the fog at about 4.30 pm and the sun came back out. On a course of 340 degrees and with the wind in our favour being westerly F5, we had a fantastic sail back getting speeds of up to 6 knots. We eventually arrived in Weymouth at 7.15 pm absolutely exhausted but having learnt a lot! The debriefing was held over a hearty meal and attempts were made to contact Bernard on Eremue. He had arrived at Alderney having gone through the shipping lanes an hour after us.

A chill-out day was had by all on Wednesday to recover from the previous day and also in preparation for Thursday. The weather report for Thursday was early mist clearing so it was all systems go. Much discussion was had on the best route and time to leave, and it was agreed that we needed to arrive at Braye at slack water and the crossing would take approximately 15 hours. Gareth and Siobhan, two of the Louisa crew, set about changing their flights home from Alderney (as we were now behind schedule) and the boats (well Louisa!) were restocked for the trip. Having learnt from the trip on Tuesday that people felt a bit queasy going down below, we would stow everything in the cockpit just under the spray hood so that no-one would have to go in the cabin unnecessarily. We turned in early on Wednesday evening only to be woken by David at 11.30. He had been on our neighbours boat who were a Belgian couple. Having a computer onboard linked to the internet they were able to track the weather system and it was showing fog. So unfortunately it was agreed to call it off for Thursday.

Well what a disappointment! It was the right thing to do of course, but disappointing nonetheless. Gareth and Siobhan were now unable to cross the Channel with us so they made the best of a bad job and got on the Fast Cat from Poole to Jersey so they were able to make the most of the last few days of their holiday. The rest of the group took a bus to Portland and spent a pleasant afternoon looking at Portland Bill and how rough the water was in the race as well as admiring the lighthouse and looking round its information centre.

Friday morning and at last we were off! The sun was shining as we left the entrance to Weymouth Harbour at 6 am. What a difference to Tuesday. A perfect wind – SW 3 to 4. It did drop at one point and the hoisting of the topsail was attempted at on Louisa but unfortunately the outhaul had come off its block and we hadn't noticed it when we had pulled up the mainsail so that was a no go. Freebooter had her topsail up but Tarka didn't so, on occasion both Louisa and Tarka had to put their engines on to keep up with Lo Shu (who was a faster boat) and Freebooter. At midday we came to the shipping lanes. It was like the little townspeople waiting for the King to pass – well according to me it was – Dad likened it more to waiting for a killer whale to go past! I say a King but really there were loads of ships and looking at them on a clear day, and the speed they were going, made us realise how right we were in turning back on Tuesday. For those people who are unaware, crossing the shipping lanes is like crossing the M25 with a central reservation so there is a gap between the ships going in the opposite direction. Passing through the east-going shipping lane there was a lot more traffic. Tony on Lo Shu held back at one point after taking a bearing as he didn't think he would clear one ship but it very kindly

changed its course. It was good to see that since people often say that the big ships don't have people on watch at all times and they just use their tracking radars. On this occasion however this was not the case and it was very reassuring to see the course being changed. It also should be noted that there a few lanes to each direction of shipping lane again similar to the M25 so on occasions you get ships overtaking other ships which makes things all the more interesting for the small ships crossing the lanes at 90 degrees. Coming out the other end of the shipping lanes, Geoff was able to contact Philip on Freya who was joining us from Dartmouth. His ETA at Braye was pretty similar to ours. We had a fabulous sail, close hauled, for the remainder of the passage and arrived in Braye Harbour at 6.15 pm. The crew of Louisa (mainly me!) made a right mess of picking up the buoy – I made the excuse of being out of practice and tired – and was then put totally to shame by Philip arriving on Freya 20 minutes later having crossed the Channel single handed and then picked up the buoy with ease! We took the water taxi to the pontoon and went to the pub. We bumped into our Belgian friends from Weymouth and who had arrived 1/2 hour earlier. In the pub we discussed our departure time for St Peter Port the next day. As we were behind schedule we had to leave the next day in order to meet Mary, Chrissie and Mum (i.e. the wives of the skippers of Freebooter, Lo Shu and Louisa) who were flying in from Southampton on Saturday evening. After our usual discussion of the best way to do things it was agreed that in order to be over the sill into the Marina in St Peter Port we would have to leave Braye at 7am. On realising this it didn't appeal to any of us tired sailors! The only other option was to leave at 5pm which would have meant we wouldn't get into the marina until 9pm which was too late as the ladies were arriving early evening.

After a very rolling night in Braye Harbour, Dad got up at 5.40 to do some navigation which he had expected to do at a more respectable time! We all left at 7am. We put up the mainsail to stabilise the boat going into the Swinge. Well that was certainly an experience – the waves were up to about 10 feet! A very bumpy ride. I was at the helm which was good as I focused on the compass rather than on how big the waves were as it was slight scary! I thought at the time it was like going on the roller coaster at a fun fair and how I never go on these types of rides as I don't like them! After coming through the Swinge everyone had chosen a different course to steer. The wind was from the NW so we had a perfect beam reach. On Louisa we had decided to put in one reef, whereas the others didn't. Just to update at this point, there were Freya, Tarka, Freebooter, Lo Shu and Louisa on this passage. Anyway there wasn't much in it at the end – Lo Shu came in first, then Freebooter, and the rest of us following immediately behind. Mind you, coming in at 5.7 knots with one reef in was pretty impressive. Arriving at St Peter Port at about 11.15 am we rafted up on the waiting pontoon. As we have a shallow draft compared to other boats we were able to go over the sill about 1.30. Domestic duties were undertaken by all crews that afternoon in preparation for the new arrivals from Southampton in the evening. Unfortunately, due to Mum not having her passport on her, she had to take a later flight after going home and retrieving it. She arrived at about 8pm, two hours behind the others.

Sunday, and it was time to do some sight seeing so we took the ferry over to Herm arriving at midday. After a (light!?) refreshment stop, the majority of the party spent the afternoon walking round the island admiring the flora and fauna. Not being the most informed person on these matters, I couldn't really tell you what exactly we saw but

judging by comments from other members of the party it was quite impressive. The rest of the party had taken a more leisurely approach and kept to the more even surface walking up to the church in the middle of the island. The whole way round took us about two hours to walk so it was quite pleasant and pretty hot too. On meeting up with the others later we had more refreshments – I also took the opportunity to wander round the two shops that being a favoured pastime on holiday for me! We all ate out together in an Italian restaurant back in St Peter Port.

On Monday each crew did their own thing. We on Louisa chose to get the bus (only £1 whatever distance you go) down to Saumarez Manor and walked round the Sculpture Trail. It was great as it suited all our tastes being a variety of different styles of art so we all enjoyed it. In the evening we had everyone on our boat for drinks – much to David's amusement when watching the waterline go down. The record for the number of people possible on a Yarmouth 23 being 10 which Louisa holds! Not forgetting of course to turn off the cockpit drains! Anyway we had some interesting chats to people passing by. I went on a research trip to Tarka and Lo Shu after drinks to get some new ideas on storage. Both boats had netting under the side lockers in the cabin to make extra room for storage which was a good idea. Not being adept at the needle though I think Louisa will probably go without these! Dad had dressed a crab for dinner and Philip joined us.

We cast off Philip on Freya at 5.45 am on Tuesday who was leaving for his single handed crossing back to Dartmouth. Mum and I spent the morning at Victor Hugo's house which was absolutely fascinating. It was a real find as he was certainly an eccentric judging by the décor – including tapestries and plates on the ceilings, backs of chairs above the windows and his initials on the furniture. The view at the top where Victor Hugo stood and wrote was fantastic – our guide said that he could see to France on a clear day. The afternoon took us to Castle Cornet and we wandered round the grounds and the museum to learn a bit of the history which I always try to do when I'm in a new place. Everyone did their own thing that evening and we on Louisa chilled out with books.

Wednesday morning we left at 10am for Sark. The weather was fantastic again. David had arranged a tour for us on a horse drawn carriage – the island only allows for tractors and horse drawn carriages. The tour was great – all round the island and we stopped off at La Seigneurie's house to admire the gardens as well as checking out the view at La Coupee which was at the bottom of the island. We did feel sorry for Spike our horse as it was so hot but glad to be on the carriage nonetheless as we probably wouldn't have enjoyed walking round the island as much. On the ferry trip back we admired the castle owned by the Barclay Brothers on Brecque which was an impressive sight.

So Thursday, and it was time for the air travellers to return home whilst the sailors went back to Braye. Tarka had left first thing with the tide. After moving out to the waiting pontoon at 9am, we had the rest of the morning so we took a bus all the way round the island stopping off at a couple of points. Back in St Peter Port we had a nice lunch then said goodbye to the air travellers. We left St Peter Port at 4pm with two reefs in. However we took them out after about an hour although that was fun as we had trouble reaching the sail ties round the boom – best to leave them undone we've learnt! We motored to catch up with the others (Lo Shu and Freebooter) and then had a good sail on a run. The Swinge was again quite bumpy. We had a very rolly night on the mooring buoy.

On Friday it was time to explore Braye. Having being a bit upset that we hadn't got time to explore it the previous week we made the most of it today. The party was split half and half with some people opting for the cruise round the island visiting the coves. For those of us who wanted to spend a bit of time on terra firma after a rolling night we went to hire a Mini Moke. What a total laugh! We had a blue car with all the covers down so was totally open (for those who are too young to remember – apparently they were very popular in the 60s!). We had a great day driving round the island probably about 3 times as it was good fun just driving round especially with the weather being so good. We stopped off to admire views, go in the museum and also for the necessary refreshments (in a very nice pub called The Old Barn with excellent choice of vegetarian food). After dropping off the Mini Moke we met up with the others in St Annes for a drink. As Dad and I were leaving early the next day we decided to eat down by the Harbour at the First and Last restaurant which was great as there again was a good choice for vegetarians.

Saturday and after a very rolly night again we were waved off by Geoff on Tarka and departed at 6.10 am. Well the first hours, to say they were a nightmare would be an understatement. It was extremely rough as we were sailing into the wind and the waves were huge. My tactic of concentrating on the compass worked to some extent but it was pretty hairy. At one point we considered changing our plans and sailing to Cherbourg but we carried on. I wanted to be home by Sunday to recover! Anyway we crossed the shipping lanes about 9.30 am which was fine – one large tanker changing course for us was much appreciated. The wind started as NE F4 and as the journey progressed moved round to SW F5 later in the afternoon. We had to laugh as mid channel, in all that space we managed to be in collision course with the only yacht in sight! We had to put the motor on to keep us going when the wind died mid morning. I managed to read my book at one point but apart from that the middle part of the journey was uneventful. Dad and I managed to fall asleep both at the same time at one point so we agreed to be more vigilant and take specified turns! The familiar sight of the Isle of Wight came into our view at about 3 pm. It stayed in our view for the next 8 hours! The wind had increased significantly to F5 coming from behind us so we had waves up to 5 feet overtaking us. We sailed on the foresails alone but had to keep the motor on so we wouldn't lose steerage when surfing over the waves. It was a long afternoon not helped by the plotter which showed the arrival time at one point being 1 am. Thankfully we were able to catch up the time though. The traffic was very busy coming out of the Eastern Solent and just before we entered it we passed the Aurora which was a fine sight. Right at the end of the journey there was traffic coming from everywhere and we had to play dodgems for so long we delayed getting home by 40 minutes which at the end of an extremely tiring day we didn't really need. We arrived home in our berth at Northney marina at ten to midnight. Looking back later on we agreed that it was probably way too far to go in one day (87 miles was the total distance) but being absolutely whacked it was good to be home.