THE VOYAGE OF THE YACHT *AHURA*

by
Lieutenant Colonel R A Preedy

The log which won the 1977 Competition for the Marcon Trophy for the Trident
Ahura, *fin keeler No 85*

It would, be easy to fix this story. To say that I had always planned to sail from Plymouth to Vigo in Spain. But it wasn't like that at all. My original aim had been to get all the way to Gibraltar. To that extent, therefore, I suppose I failed. It doesn't really feel like it though. Perhaps I had better start at the beginning.

I am a regular Army officer and in March 1975 I was lucky enough to be given command of 29 Commando Light Regiment Royal Artillery, based at the Royal Citadel in Plymouth. A keen but fairly inexperienced sailor, I took advantage of being for once so close to the sea by buying *Ahura* in August 1975 from a man in Sheffield. She is a fin-keeled Trident, sail number 85 and built in 1968. The original owner - a Scot - had registered her with Lloyds under her present name which comes from the Gaelic and means "dragon-slayer". I liked the name and have kept it - it would have been unlucky to change it anyway.

For 18 months, until March this year, *Ahura* rested on her legs at the house while I overhauled her completely. Fortunately her survey report gave her a clean bill of health but she looked dirty and rather uncared for and I wanted to bring her back into top condition. I went through the lot. Topsides, hull and deck rubbed right down, filled and painted with 5 coats of 708 polyurethane. Volvo engine out and overhauled. Wire rigging immersed in bailed linseed oil for a year. All ancillary equipment overhauled or renewed. Complete interior, including engine compartment, cleaned and repainted. All wood inside and outside rubbed down and re-varnished. Complete GRP interior of cabin covered in foam-backed PVC. Wooden storm covers made for the cabin windows. Strong storm doors fitted outside of the washboards. These last two improvements were suggested by the designer, Alan Hill, who also recommended a thorough inspection of the chainplates. This I did. I also fitted twin forestays, twin backstays and I doubled up all the shrouds with nylon rope. This last precaution was designed as a form .of insurance. If one of the stainless steel shrouds went the nylon rope preventer should hold things long enough for me to replace the wire shroud with another made up from my spare coil of wire rigging and some bulldog grips.

I took other precautions too. For instance, I made up some copper cringles - square, sheets of copper of various sizes with holes drilled to take self-tapping screws. I then

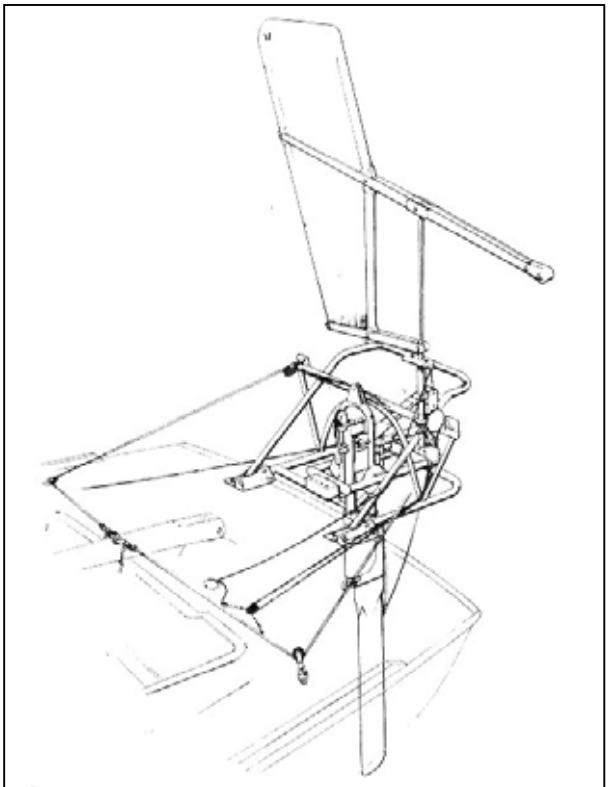
kept my hand-drill ready in a cabin locker with the same size drill bit fitted. Thus prepared I hoped that if holed I could, after stemming the initial, flow with a cushion or something, drill enough holes in the hull to screw on the copper cringle. That is the theory anyway - and I am told it works! I hope I never find out.

You will have gathered by now that I had some fairly ambitious sailing in mind. Well I had. Until June this year I had been planning firmly on participating in the single-handed division of the 1979 Azores and Back Race - AZAB 79 - and had in fact already entered. After all, it seemed to me that the Trident is a beautiful sea-boat, well able to cope with rough weather and I saw no reason not to go for the AZAB.

Alan Hill agreed and kindly made the various suggestions I have already mentioned. To be honest, two other things concerned me a little and I raised them with him. First, the rudder is unsupported as you know and I wondered if it might not be bent or otherwise damaged in a real storm. Alan Hill thought it extremely unlikely and. took the trouble to explain why. I was also a bit worried about the lack of depth in the bilges. It wouldn't take much water to float the floorboards. He agreed with this but repeated his advice about the storm doors and reckoned that, given these, the risk would be a very small one - certainly an acceptable one.

I bought quite a few extras, quartz chronometer, Ebbco Special sextant, RDF, barometer. I already had a Harrier log and an echo-sounder. I knew I could borrow a life-raft from the Navy. Incidentally, later I took the trouble to go along to Salcombe Marine, the Board of Trade life-raft testers, to be fully briefed and to watch them activate one of their rafts. It made one feel better!

Anyway, to get back to the story. In June my world seemed to fall in when I heard I had .sheen posted to Brunei starting in April next year. The posting will last until June 1980. Bang went the AZAB. For a time I just sat and contemplated my bad luck. Perhaps I ought to qualify that. Brunei is about the best overseas posting left these days,and so I really ought not to complain. But sailing-wise it was a catastrophe. Then, one evening, the ultimate crazy scheme occurred to me. I hand over my regiment in October. I go to Brunei in April. Between the two I would no doubt be employed, failing anything else, on temporary jobs in the U.K. Why not instead sail the boat to Brunei? Bit by bit. As I thought it through the whole thing began to seem less and less mad, more and more practicable.



Hasler-Gibb self steering

It went rather like this. Sail the boat to Gibraltar and thus out of the Atlantic - during my summer leave this August. Leave it with the Navy and fly back. Finish my tour as CO in October. Then fly back to Gibraltar. Thereafter sail in stages to Malta (where I have contacts), Cyprus (where I have more), Port Said, Port Sudan, Aden, Colombo, Singapore, Brunei. Total distance : 10,300 miles.

Longest single leg: Aden to Colombo (2,530 miles). Weather-wise it seemed to work out pretty well. The Admiralty Pilots suggested fair winds all the way except for the second half of the Red Sea - when it would be mostly right in my face - and the Arabian Ocean - where it would be mainly on my port bow.

To cut a long story short I decided to give it a go. At least, I thought, I'll do the Plymouth to Gibraltar bit during summer leave. This will show up any obvious snags. If it then turns out to be impracticable I can always sail the boat from Gibraltar to Marseilles this autumn and come back via the French canals across the Channel.

One important requirement before I left was to acquire, fit and try out a Hasler-Gibbs self-steering gear. This I did just in time. Incidentally, for those interested I can say that the Trident is ideally suited to this gear. It fits easily on the transom behind the stern locker lids and the resulting configuration obeys all the rules that Hasler-Gibbs stipulate for correct operation of the gear. Even better, the forward steering blocks through which the steering ropes pass lie naturally along the top of the teak capping surrounding the cockpit. The result is that they hold their position even in very light winds. Otherwise Hasler-Gibbs recommend that you build up special wooden pieces to support these blocks in light weather. With the Trident it wasn't necessary. Perhaps I can add that the Hasler-Gibbs was a joy throughout the trip - and on any point o sailing.

The days immediately before departure were frantic : not so much in preparing for the trip - I had been doing that for a long time; but because of HM The Queen's visit to Plymouth. This happened on 5 August but of course there were countless rehearsals beforehand. I was due to leave at 0400 hours on the 7th.

The Citadel, Plymouth

Promptly at 1645. on the 5 August the Royal car drew up in front of me on Plymouth Hoe. The Queen alighted. I heard myself say, "May it please Your Majesty to receive the key of .your Royal Citadel."

Her Majesty nodded graciously, approached and touched the key. "Does it actually work?" she asked.

"Yes, Ma'am, we have a padlock in the guardroom of your Royal Citadel which it fits."

The Queen seemed to like that and Prince Philip laughed at her elbow. The Royal Party passed on, I saluted and the parade continued. By 1800 it was all over. At last, I thought, I can really concentrate on the trip. I hope that doesn't sound ungracious.

The alarm went off at 0303 on Sunday morning the 7 August. It was pitch dark outside. I climbed out of my sleeping bag and got cracking. By 0545 I had washed, shaved, had a cup of coffee, bent on mainsail and genoa and started the engine. Just about ready to go. Then suddenly I became aware of some one standing on the stone jetty above me. One of my Battery Commanders, Major Ian Dobbie (himself a keen

and very competent ocean-racing skipper) had actually.got out of bed and come down to see me off. I thought that was pretty good.

“What's that in the cockpit?” he asked. It was the Dunlop Seafarer 6-man liferaft standing on its end. Perhaps I should explain that , as I did to Ian at the time. This was the smallest liferaft I could borrow from the Navy yet even so it virtually filled the cockpit well. There was just enough room to open the storm doors at the forward end but widthwise it was a jam-tight fit at the after end. Not that I was complaining about this because on the Archimedean principle, I was much happier to have the buoyant life-raft filling the cockpit well than possibly some 150 gallons of water if pooped by a large wave at some stage. So I was quite happy to put up with the lack of cockpit leg-room. There is a snag, however. With the liferaft in position the engine gear lever in the cockpit had to stay in forward gear, i.e.flat on the floor. No problem, I thought, the engine starts quite easily in gear and I certainly don’t expect to want to go backwards - except perhaps on arrival in Gibraltar harbour! For now, however, I was warming up the engine before leaving and so I wanted neutral. Hence the liferaft on its end. Complicated isn't it?

Disaster No. 1 occurred when I went to switch on the navigation lights. No lights. I couldn’t believe it - they had never even looked like failing before, quickly I checked battery, fuses, earthing, everything I could think of. No good. Now what? Did I now postpone my start to get the electrics sorted out - on a Sunday? I thought for a moment or two and then decided against it. Already now it was almost light and so there would be no problem until that evening. By then I hoped to have the lights working, failing which I would light the faithful Tilley lamp and lash it on deck. Those who know Tilley lamps will realize that they give a light immensely more powerful than ordinary navigation lights. They also last 9 hours on one filling of paraffin. Admittedly my lights would be incorrect for a sailing vessel under way of my size – but I reasoned that fishing vessels often seem to use a single white light. I would rarely be exceeding 4 knots while the vessels I met would probably be doing 20. As far as they were concerned, therefore, I would be virtually stationary.

That sufficed to decide me to go ahead without delay. Ian helped me to let go the warps and asked me my course.

“230 degrees for Corunna,” I replied. He grinned. Thus at 0405 , Sunday 7 August I said goodbye to Ian, slipped the warps and gently left the Royal Marines Camber Jetty to edge out into Plymouth Sound with the first glimmering of dawn. *Ahura* and I were off.

Drakes Island and Plymouth Sound

The weather looked good - so good that it seemed like tempting fate even to think about it. The Met. office at *RAF Mountbatten* seemed confident that the wind would stay somewhere between north-west and north-east for the next three days, varying between force 1 and 5. This

was more than I could have hoped for. Thinking about it in the weeks before leaving I had expected to meet the south westerlies in the first few days as I tried to get south of Ushant. Yet here was the wind, admittedly very light, pushing me gently to the south-west.

I had sent my Harrier log back to the makers, Brookes andGatehouse for overhaul some days before. They had reset the mileometer to 9975 at my request since I had hoped a few hours sailing would bring it pretty well to zero by the time I left. In fact there had been no time for sailing in the last few days so it still needed some 25 miles before it went back to the start. At 0600, therefore, the entry in my log reads: 0600. Log 9982.46. Barometer 1021. Force 2 NW. Course 230. Engine on.

By 0900. hours the wind had freshened a little to Force 5 and I was able to shut off the Volvo. We were going well. At 1000 the log read: 1000. Log 0000.43. Barometer 1022. Force 3/4 WNW. Course 230.

So that was 17.97 nautical miles in 4 hours or 4.49 per hour. *Ahura* was heeling over quite a bit now, at least for her – she is pretty stiff usually and the weight of all the extra stores had made her even more stable. Genoa and main were pulling well, the self-steering was showing off - this surely couldn't last !

It didn’t. I can't remember what it was that made me look into the cabin at about 1050 but it was a good thing I did. The water in the bilges was lapping well over the floorboards on the port side as the boat heeled. Something was wrong. As soon as I removed the engine cover and floor-board at the after end of the cabin I realized that we were taking in water - and much too quickly for comfort. A small stream was pulsing past the side of the engine port-side mounting block. Somewhere aft we were taking in water at a rate of about half a gallon a minute. Panic stations. Stern gland? A leak at the zinc anode fitting? How about a leak at the sea-water inlet?

I decided it must be a leak at the propeller stern gland. When I wrote to the original owner some months before he had told me that on one occasion the universal joint on the propeller shaft had failed and the propeller shaft had shot to the rear straight out of the boat. After that he had fitted a jubilee clip on the shaft to prevent a recurrence .of this and I had taken good care to renew it myself. Perhaps it had gone again, at least enough to let in water. I had to find out - quickly.

The next ten minutes passed in a blur. First, get the liferaft up onto the port cockpit seat and secure it temporarily. Now, after lifting the floorboard grating, I could get at the engine inspection panels. I unscrewed them as fast as I could but it took another five minutes and I knew the water was still coming in. At last I got the first one off and stuck my head in the hole. No water leak at the stern gland. In that; case where on earth was it coming from? I had another look - and found the

answer. It was slopping through the hole in the bulkhead from the port cockpit locker, quickly I removed the port seat and looked inside. Mystery solved! The bilge pump pipe had been knocked off its fitting at the outboard end by a jerrycan of fuel which had banged against it; and because of the angle of heel the water was literally pouring

through the skin fitting in the topsides. I breathed a sigh of relief and then got cracking.

First, I eased the sheets until the boat was almost upright. This stopped most of the water coming in. Then with a screwdriver I tried to get the bilge pump pipe back onto its fitting and tighten the jubilee clip. This was an awful, job - as I expect you know. The fitting is just at extreme arm's length - for me anyway - and it's very difficult to get ;any real purchase on the- screwdriver. After two failures - when. the pipe slipped off its fitting again - I at last managed to get it on and properly tightened up. I then sealed the joint with Seelastic and fitted a wooden bung into the outboard side of the skin fitting. I realised of course, that the bung would have to come out again if I needed to pump the boat out but that could be done in a master of seconds.

It took me twenty minutes to empty the water out of the bilges - about 10 bucketfuls altogether. Then it only remained to re-stow the gear in the cockpit locker so that the pipe couldn't possibly get knocked off again. After that I cleared up.

1500 hours. Log 012.54 Barometer 1324. Force 2 NW. Course 230.

I decided- to take a sun meridian altitude at 1524 (ship's noon), more for practice than anything else since I had an adequate fix from a combination of a bearing on Lizard Head and distance run. In the event the difference between the two was about five miles for latitude which I was fairly satisfied with. After all, if I could be that close as I neared land at Gibraltar I wouldn't be far out. I would maintain permanent watch from about 30 miles out and that ought to suffice.

1700 Log 0026.10 Barometer 1024. Force 4 WNW Course 230.

The wind was getting up a bit but it was very good sailing and the barometer had been climbing slowly all day. Moreover, the weather forecast at 1355 had promised well for Biscay and Finisterre: "NW 3 or 4, backing W later. Good visibility but locally poor later."

For the next two hours or so I tried to find the gremlins in the electrics. They had to be working by 2100 or it would mean using the Tilley lamp. I tried everything I could think of. I am no electrician but I usually manage to get somewhere simply by using my common-sense. Not this time. Eventually I realized that I wasn't going to win and so I assessed the situation. No navigation lights, no deck light, no chart light, no cabin light.

Fortunately the engine would start on the handle so that was alright. Still, it was a blow. By 2000 I had had a light snack - I really wasn't a bit hungry. The log read:

2000. Log 0039.36. Barometer 1024. Force 2/3 NW. Course 230 .

It was time for a fix by RDF. I wondered how easy it would be to pick up accurate signals. Suck it and see. Within 20 minutes I had 5 excellent bearings on Ushant, Round Island (Scillies) and the Lizard. What's more, they met in a perfect point. I was immensely cheered.

In the remaining hour before last light I lit the Tilly lamp, fixed it on top of the cabin and hoisted my 18-inch radar reflector to the cross trees. Halfway through the latter evolution I realized I hadn't put on my life-harness - idiot. One thing was sure: if I

went overboard from now on I would stay overboard, especially with ‘Puff’ (my pet name for the Hasler-Gibbs) working so well. I resolved to make it an inflexible rule from now on to put on my life-harness whenever leaving the cockpit and regardless of the sea-state. By 2200 my log read: Log 0044.75. Barometer 1024. Force 1. Sails flapping.

By 2200 I had had enough of this - which was silly really. After all , I had had a pretty good run so far and all in the right direction. Somehow, though, the lack of progress was getting on my nerves. We were doing only 1.5 knots. Perhaps more important, the sails were chafing badly as the yacht rolled. On went the engine again.

Fortunately by about 0100 the wind increased just enough to let me switch the engine off again. Then I went to bed after pumping the Tilley lamp and having a good look around the horizon. No ships in sight. I cat-napped through the night, getting up every 45 minutes or so to check for other shipping. Altogether I suppose I managed about 3.5hrs hours sleep. The Tilley lamp went right on through the night, shining out like a searchlight. I saw one other ship at about 0315 well to starboard.

By 0400 the log read 0048.4 which meant that I had completed 75 miles in the twenty four hours. Not bad at all, I thought. However now the wind had dropped again so on went the Volvo again at 0410. The forecast for 0655 8. August was: “Shallow low 1012 West Sole moving SE. Calm or Force 2, locally 3 or 4 in South Plymouth. Biscay vari-able 2 or 3, locally 4, showers.'

Nightfall over Biscay

My luck seemad to be holding, although again I could have wished for a little more wind. The day passed without incident. The wind got up again at about 0530 reached Force 3 by. 0900, died again by 1100, piped up again to Force 3 by 1200 and so on. By lunchtime I felt hungry for the first time since leaving Plymouth and had some ‘egg banjos’ (fried egg sandwich), tomatoes and a pear.

1700 hours. Log l00.00 (exactly). Barometer 1024. Force 1. Course 230 .

At 1750 after putting on the engine I took another series of good RDF fixes on Ushant, Ile Vierge, Round Island and Roches Douvres. The fix put me 155 nautical miles from Plymouth as against 127 on the log. Perhaps this difference was due to current.

The evening and the. night that followed were a carbon copy of the previous one. A bit of a breeze got up -at about 2150, just enough to let me switch off the engine again and push us along at about 2 knots. I noticed the wind had veered round to the east. By 0400 the log read 152.00 nautical miles, a day's run of 84 miles, this was better still, particularly since once again it was all in the right direction. I was now well

south of Ushant and realized that by that evening (Tuesday the 9 August) I ought to pass over the edge of the continental shelf into some 4,500 fathoms of water. This was rather a sobering thought until I thought again and realized that 2 fathoms and 4,500 fathoms were really much the same if I was unwise enough to fall off the boat.

Throughout this initial period certain things kept crossing my mind. First, I found that I was watching my own reactions quite closely to see how this single-handed business

Was affecting me. So far not at all, it seemed though now and then I found myself getting really depressed for no reason at all. After the first couple of days I began to recognise this as a specific phenomena and soon managed to shake myself out of these moods. Having read most of the single-handed books, I found I was also waiting for the peace of mind which is supposed to envelop one once two or three days out. I confess it never really reached me, perhaps because deep down there was always a feeling of apprehension - or plain honest fear, I suppose - which prevented me from ever really relaxing and enjoying it all.

I suppose I was waiting for the Bay of Biscay to justify its reputation. I found that I was also worrying about Mary, my wife; worrying that she would be worrying. Never once had, she asked me not to go - nor would she have done so - but I remembered her face on Saturday night when she left me at the jetty. I knew she would be worrying now and would go on worrying until I got to Gibraltar. Over the next few days I found myself thinking about this more and more. After all, I knew I was alright but Mary didn't. Nor was there any way of letting her know.

The other pre-occupation was the one I tried hardest of all to push to the back of my mind; and I suppose it is psychologically significant that I haven't mentioned it until now. For years now I have had a bit of a bad back - brought on originally by rugby - and now and then I have had to be pushed and pulled by an osteopath. Then, three weeks or so before leaving on the trip, I had done something to my back when working on the boat. Within half an hour I could hardly walk. Within two hours I was stretched out on the living-room floor in a great deal of pain. I remember it took me 55 minutes to visit the toilet. Eventually at 10 am next morning I was carted off to the Royal Navy hospital on a stretcher where for four days I was drugged up to the eyebrows. Then Commander Bertram, Royal Navy, manipulated my back under anaethetic and three days later I was out of hospital. In the next fortnight I deliberately put my back to the test. Not that that was hard to do. On the one hand there were endless foot-stamping rehearsals on Plymouth Hoe. On the other, I had to load up the boat. The back came through all this without a single twinge, assisted by the rubber corset that I was now wearing. Eventually, about 4 or 5 days before leaving, I decided that the back trouble had been a one in a million thing which would not recur.

You will no doubt have decided by now that I must be crackers. Bad back, no electrics, serious water leak and still going on with the trip. You are right, of course, But it all just goes to show the lengths to which one will go if really committed to something.

Porpoises

The thing that worried me now, of course, was that with the electrics gone I was having to start the engine by hand - not ideal treatment for a bad back! However, I had already started it 5 or 6 times without a twinge – perhaps one small one - and I told myself that it might even be doing it good!

That morning (Tuesday 9 Augut.) was a satisfying one. The wind got up to a good force 3 so we were sailing quite well and this gave me a chance to re-oil and fuel the engine. I was also at last able to unscrew the grease gun for the stern gland which had been stuck. I re-filled the grease gun and the engine was now ready for further duty. Through the day the wind varied between Force 2 and 3 as the shipping forecast told of high pressure intensifying between the Azores and Plymouth. By 1800 the log read:

Log 176.66 Barometer 1029. Force 1/2 ENE. Course 230 .

Ten minutes later, as I was scanning the horizon for some other sign of life, I saw a line of spray about a mile ahead. Looking closer I saw to my delight that it was a school of porpoises in line ahead crossing from starboard to port. I was surprised because I was still only 2 days out of Plymouth and I really hadn't expected to see them this far north. I realized that I had probably just crossed over the edge of the continental shelf although I can't say that I noticed any great change in the colour of the water. Half an hour later the as to

Ebbco sextant

whether these really were porpoises - I had begun to wonder if I really had seen them was put beyond all doubt. Suddenly they were all round the boat, looking magnificent in the golden evening sunshine. Their dorsal fins made a 'zip' sound as they cleared the water and very quickly they settled to the fun of criss-crossing *Ahura*'s bows. They kept this up for nearly an hour, never seeming to tire of the game. I could lean over the side and see them passing up the side of the boat about 6 or 8 feet down.

Then they would surface right at the bow, crossing our path so close to the bows that it seemed they must strike. But they never did. Throughout this time I remained glued to the cockpit seat, thoroughly enjoying the spectacle and thinking that at last I had seen for myself whait the single-handers had written about in so many books.

I had been a bit lazy about sunsights, mainly because it was so easy to use the RDF. However, I was now well out into the Bay of Biscay and I reckoned I would have to use the sextant once I lost Ushant and Round Island beacons. But I had a pleasant surprise in store. Then taking my RDF bearings at 1915 hours I suddenly picked up Cape Viliano and Cape Bares on the north coast of Spain. Both of these were still at least 500 miles away and yet they were coming through loud and clear despite a rated range in Reeds of only 100 miles. I was delighted because it meant I would get accurate fixes right across the Bay - unless of course,these were freak conditions. In fact the next few days preyed it was no freak - I always managed to get these stations loud and clear.

In a way of course this unexpected bonus was a pity because I confess I continued to neglect my sextant. But it certainly made life easier and anyway I was fairly happy about using the sextant.

By 0400 on Wednesday 10 August the log read 211.60, the barometer was steady at 1029 and the wind somewhere between Force 3 and 4 - excellent sailing conditions. The day's run was 79.60 nautical miles so it looked as if I was averaging between 70 and 80 a day, all in the right direction. I was certainly being spoiled, particularly when I reflected that the genoa and unreefed main had been up continuously since leaving Plymouth on Sunday morning, over 72 hours before. A fix at 0850 put me 257 miles from Plymouth as against a log reading of 250.40.

The day passed without incident except that at 1345 I was delighted to see the first evidence of human life for nearly two days. Ahead of me I could see 5 or 6 brightly painted fishing boats, each with two very long poles sticking out either side of the boat and each pole towing three lines. These I knew would be the Portuguese tunny fishermen and I read from the Biscay Pilot that this fleet spent the whole of the summer out in the middle of Biscay. I didn't see them catch anything as I passed but I waved and got a wave back which did wonders for the morale. I felt that I wanted to give one of the boats - the closest one - a packet of cigarettes or something but realized that they couldn't afford to stop. The fishing lines seemed to go back a great distance - perhaps 1.5 miles – and the boats were keeping up a speed of about 12 knots through the water whilst fishing. By 1500 hours they had all disappeared behind me.

The porpoises paid another visit...

The weather forecast that evening promised a bit more wind: *Biscay, Finisterre. NE 3 or 4, locally 5 in NW Finisterre at first*. It looked good. The porpoises returned briefly at 1900 hours, otherwise it was another uneventful evening and night with the wind doing just enough to keep me going at about 2-3 knots. By 0400 the log read 289.47, the barometer 1026 and the wind was NE Force 3. The day's run was 77.87 nautical miles. So we were keeping up our average and still the genoa and unreefed mainsail continued unchanged.

After the morning fix it became clear that I needed to alter course a bit. Until now I had steered 230 all the way from Plymouth but gradually this was taking me west of the line to clear Cape Finisterre. I had always planned to give Cape Finnisterre a wide berth of, say, 40-50 miles because of the Pilot's warning about the currents which set into the Bay as one approached the north coast of Spain. However, unless I did something it was obvious that I was going to clear Cape Finisterre by about 100 miles. I therefore altered course to 215 . The effect of this was to bring the ENE wind almost directly behind me and so at about 0800 that morning (Thursday 11 August) I goose-

winged the genoa. The other information which the RDF fix elicited was that I was now only some 115 miles from Corunna. I was encouraged by the thought that, at this rate of progress, I would be on the same latitude as Corunna in another day and a half -say by late Friday evening.

I had another brief visit from porpoises at 0805 hours. Meanwhile the wind continued fairly light until 1000 hours when it got up to a good force 3. This marked the beginning of a good piece of sailing. For a little while I put off the job of rigging up the spinnaker pole to boom out the genoa and stop it collapsing every time the boat rolled. The truth was that I was feeling pretty tired, I suppose. I had had little more than 2-3 hours sleep a night since leaving Plymouth and this was making me feel somewhat lethargic. Eventually, however, I put on the life- harness and rigged up the pole after a bit of a struggle.

It was worth it. The speedometer went up by nearly a full knot and we were now really starting to move through the water. By 1015 the wind had increased still more to Force 4. At 1100 I noted: Log 512.08. Barometer l028. Force 4 ENE. Course 215.

It was shortly after this that the log stopped. I was down in the cabin when I suddenly heard the whistle from the log which indicated that the speed had fallen below half a knot. In fact, however, we were doing about 4 knots. I went through the fault-finding drill and to my delight the log started working again when I turned the impellor through 180 . Obviously it had picked up some weed which was now clear. Feeling quite pleased, I set my mind to trimming the sails again because the wind was freshening with every minute. By 1500 it had risen almost to Force 5. Large waves, their tops breaking-in the sunlight, came rolling up from behind, hung suspended for a moment or two above the stern and then passed happily and quietly underneath.

Ahura was behaving extremely well in the circumstances and a tendency to yaw was largely eliminated by the use of shock cord tensioners on the tiller. The wind continued to push me along until about 1530 hours when, in the space of half an hour or so it dropped right down to Force 1 or 2. A quiet evening was followed by an equally quiet night. Now and then I had to use the engine but otherwise it was gentle sailing at about 2 knots. By 0155 the wind had veered slightly to the east and it became clear that I needed the mainsail on the other side to avoid a standing gybe. I therefore gybed under control and we continued as before. The fix at 0400, Friday 12th. August showed that the day's run had been 78.97 nautical miles and that I was now about 400 miles or so from Plymouth. It was a nice feeling looking at the chart to see the distance covered and to note that we were really getting quite close to the coast of Spain. I suppose I was also relieved to be closing the coast after having been, at one time, nearly 200 miles from land. The 0655 forecast predicted Force 3 or 4 NE winds for Biscay with moderate visibility. Already, however, the wind was up to force 5 and a slightly brassy look about the sky seemed to indicate that there was more wind to come.

I had been feeling a bit low ever since getting up at 0545 and had put it down to tiredness - again I had only had about 2 hours sleep. Then for some reason I put my hand on my forehead and realized that something was wrong. My forehead was very hot indeed. It was obvious that I had a temperature. I sat down for a bit and digested

this. It had to be mild food poisoning, I thought and racked my brains as to what it could be. I had carefully boiled all my water, while my food was by now all tinned, so it was difficult to know what had caused the problem.

Whatever the cause I dosed myself with Aspirin and some Kaolin mixture - .the latter as a form of insurance - and tried to forget about it. I decided, however, that I would try and lie down for a bit during the day if I could. I was getting too little sleep and it seemed silly to keep pushing on just for the sake of 2-3 miles extra distance when I could, perhaps, have 2-3 hours extra sleep instead.

The slight change in wind direction during the night had put us on a broad reach so that now, as the wind freshened, we were really beginning to move through the water. Some flying fish passed close by at about 0815 (later that day I found a dead one about 5 inches long lying on top of the port stern locker lid.) Then at 1045 1 suddenly saw a little yellow bird approach from the east, circle the boat once and then land at the bow on the starboard guard rail. It was quite a feat actually because the boat was jumping around a bit. He was about sparrow size and bright yellow in colour - a sort of tubby canary! For about five minutes he perched on the guardrail with his head under his wing and then he hopped down onto the foredeck. Thereafter I lost sight of him for about 10 minutes - I didn't want to stand up in case I frightened him away. I needn't have worried. Suddenly he came hopping towards me across the cabin roof and finished up on top of the cabin storm doors not more than 18 inches from my face. There he remained for some time looking curiously at me but apparently quite unafraid. Once he overbalanced backwards down into the cabin but he quickly flew up again and resumed his perch. I wondered how long he would stay with me and was thinking of giving him some Ryvita or something when he flew off again, still heading west. I can only imagine that he was off to the Azores, although it seems incredible to me that so small a bird could make a non-stop journey of some 800 miles across the sea.

Flying fish

So much for wild life, which I must say I welcomed. Meanwhile the wind had continued to get stronger and by mid-day it had risen to a good Force 5 again - if anything, stronger than the day before. At times now the boat was yawing badly despite the tensioners on the tiller and we would tear off to port for about 50 yards, yaw round again and then tear off to starboard for about the same distance. This went on for, some time until I decided that something had to be done. Basically we were carrying too much sail, I thought. The mainsail was still unreefed and although I had eased the mainsheet to spill some of the wind it was only just under control. I also had the genoa boomed out (it had stayed that way since the day before) and I began to worry about whether I would be able to remove the spinnaker pole if the wind increased still further.

So at about 1250 I went forward and removed the pole. At 1100 hours that morning the log had read 393.08. By 1600 when the wind dropped in the space of an hour to Force 2 it had reached 414.74. This was 25.66 miles in 5 hours or 4.75 knots - the best sailing so far. I could see now that by early next morning I would, at my present rate

of progress, be on the same latitude as Cape Villano which is just about the northernmost part of the coast of Spain. I saw this very much as an important milestone in my journey. For one thing it would mean that I had completed my crossing of the Bay of Biscay. For another it meant that I could then alter course to 180 degrees True to begin the second half of my voyage down the coast of Spain and Portugal. That Friday evening and night passed fairly quietly although I was still feeling rather ill and had not lost my temperature.

Eventually I got up around 0400 for my 24 hour check. The log read 452.54 miles. Barometer 1022. Force 2 Easterly. Course 210 . Some fog: visibility 2 miles.

I followed this entry with an RDF fix as follows:

Cape Villano : 100 M = 91°T Cape Finisterre : 125M = 116°T

This was what I had been waiting for. Cape Villano [the north western corner of Spain] was now almost exactly abeam and at last I could change course due south to begin the second half of my voyage. My morale, despite my continuing temperature, shot up immediately. Incidentally, the day's run until 0400, Saturday, 15 August had been 84.13 nautical miles - the best so far and the result of the excellent sailing conditions the day before.

It was time to take stock of my situation. In my log the entry reads: “By chart 497 miles from Plymouth. By chart 557 miles from Gibraltar. So far I have taken 6 days and 6 hours (log 470.58). Therefore if all goes well I can expect to take another 7 days and 6 hours to reach Gibraltar. Total Plymouth to Gibraltar :15 days and 12 hours.”.

Obviously I knew that this was a very rough guess. After all, I had not yet had a single head wind to cope with. I could hardly expect this to continue, even allowing for the fact that Spain and Portugal Pilot showed 90% winds from between northwest and northeast. Still, things were looking good and if only I could get rid of this temperature I reckoned all would be well.

That was then that I discovered the reason for my illness. Feeling a little thirsty, I reached for the carton of Long life milk and took a large gulp. It had gone off. I spat out what I could but most of it I had swallowed before I had realized what it was like. This was a blow. Not content with unknowingly drinking sour milk in my coffee - or so I now supposed - I had now compounded the problem by drinking some more - neat. Out came the kaolin again – and the aspirin. At least, however, I now knew what had caused the problem - which was a relief. I was actually rather surprised because that particular carton of milk had only been opened just over 24 hours before and in my experience it usually lasts at least 3 days. However, I had obviously underestimated .the effect of the changing climate. By day

it was getting really, warm now , while the occasional running of the engine only served to increase the cabin temperature. I should have realized this.

At 0500, when adjusting the tiller lines in the darkness, I saw that the porpoises had come to pay me another visit. This surprised me a little because it was still some time before dawn and somehow I hadn't expected to see them. The log at 0600 showed that the barometer had dropped yet another millibar to 1021 - that was 7 millibars since noon the previous day. I also noticed that the wind had gone right round to the west – which was the reason for adjusting the tiller lines earlier. One way or another I suspected that there might be some dirty weather coming. Remembering the lively sailing of the previous day I decided that the seamanlike thing to do was to reef early and to change the genoa for the No. 1 Jib. In retrospect it is clear that I over-reacted. After all, the wind at that time was little more than Force 2 and the barometer had not really dropped that far. At the back of my mind, though, was the knowledge that I was both tired and rather off colour and I certainly did not want to be caught by a sudden increase in wind strength and have to struggle with the sails. Also, until now I had managed to pick up the shipping forecast but this morning I failed for the first time. We were obviously at extreme range. So I now had to rely solely on the barometer and I was taking no chances.

At 0650 I saw my first ship for 2 days. I must admit I had expected to see more by now because I was getting pretty close to the busy shipping lanes of Cape Finisterre. Then I took another look at the horizon and realized that for the last couple of days the visibility had probably been down to 2 miles or so and this would account for not seeing passing ships.

By 1000 hours that Saturday morning the wind had gone all the way round to the south, and I was punching into a head wind for the first time since leaving Plymouth over 6 days before. With No.l jib and reefed main I was obviously not well placed for beating, even with the engine on to help the Force 2 wind. The best course I could lay was about 125 T. Looking back now, I simply can't remember what it was that made me choose the starboard tack towards land rather than the port tack. Probably it was nothing more than a natural desire to get closer to *terra firma,* although in fairness I was still rather further out from Cape Finisterre than I had originally meant to be. In the event, however, it proved to be a fateful decision. The next 50 hours or so were going to prove exciting.

'Huge supertankers hammered past at 20-25 knots...'

An RDF fix at noon put me exactly on the same latitude as Cape Finisterre and about 55 miles off. Visibility remained moderate to poor at about 2 miles or so. Looking at the 1arge scale chart of the north coast of Spain I could see that soon our track would cross just south of the traffic separation lanes off the Cape. I began to see more and more ships. I suppose I should have realized beforehand just how congested this area would be. After all, every ship from Europe en route to

the Mediterranean or Africa cuts this corner off Cape Finisterre-and-vice versa. Soon the truth of this really became evident. Huge super-tankers and cargo ships came hammering past at about 20-25 knots, ploughing a wide straight furrow through the sea. Twice I had to alter course to keep clear of them. As I expected, all these ships were proceeding southwards in compliance with the southward pointing arrow marked on the outside shipping lane.

It was about 1245 when, looking towards the south I noticed what seemed to be a low white cloud rolling across the sea towards me. For a moment I couldn't understand what had caused it but I was soon left in no doubt at all. Within 5 minutes the bank of fog enveloped me and visibility suddenly reduced drastically. At the same time the wind began to drop to Force 2 or so. I reached for the foghorn.

'A white cloud rolling towards me...'

It didn't take long for the seriousness of the situation to hit me. So far as I could judge I was now pretty well through the outside lane (each lane was about five miles wide) and was just entering the narrow strip of water of no man's land between the two. Just about the worst possible position. Whichever way I went now I would have to cross one of the lanes to get clear of the shipping. Even as I thought about this I heard the long, mournful note of a fog horn. A ship was approaching.

After about ten minutes, during which time the fog horn became louder and louder, I began to hear the noise of a ship's engines. Was he watching his radar, I wondered? I hoped so. Looking up at my 18 inch radar reflector I comforted myself with the knowledge that it was quite a big reflector, correctly mounted with a flat horizontal base, so that it should be producing quite a big echo on the ship's radar screen.. The noise of the engine came closer still. I kept sounding my fog horn, increasing the frequency with every minute and strained my eyes in the direction of the noise. One thing was sure : I was now in the easterly or inside lane because this ship was heading northwards. Suddenly there it was, a super-tanker about half a mile away, looking very big indeed. On its present course I saw to my relief that it was going to pass about 400 yards astern of me. I hoped that it really had seen me on the radar because I noticed as it came thundering by that it was still going very fast despite the fog, certainly above 20 knots.

So there it was. I was going to have this now for at least the next two hours or so as I tried to clear the second lane. Already I could hear two other fog horns bleating out some miles away. I freely confess that the prospect appalled and frightened me. After all, I had twice earlier had to alter course to miss ships which appeared not to have seen me. And that was in relatively clear visibility. What would happen now I didn't like to think about. One thing was obvious: the sooner I got out of this lot the better.

By now the wind had dropped to Force 1 and even for brief periods, to a flat calm. Until how I had been reluctant to start the engine because this would take me out of the cockpit when it was important that I kept watch. But now there was no alternative.

Taking a long look at the horizon - all of 800 yards away - I quickly climbed down into the cabin, removed the engine cover and reached for the starting handle and. aerosol can of Easi-Start. By now I was becoming expert at starting the engine by hand. The best method, at least for my engine, was to set the throttle half open, turn

the engine as fast as possible and then engage the compression lever without reducing the speed of turning the engine. At the first attempt the engine fired but slowly died away again. More alcohol mixture. I tried again - and that's when it happened.

Suddenly an agonizing pain shot like a hot needle up my back. I re-member dropping the starting handle on the cabin floor and collapsing in the starboard bunk. This time, I thought, you've really done it. I already knew what the score was - the nature and. extent of the pain was only too familiar. If it followed the pattern of last time it would soon become slightly less painful, little more than a dull ache provided I lay flat on my back, but then would come the awful cramp around the spine.

The doctors called it “going into muscular spasm” but as far as I was concerned it was exactly like cramp in the leg. The only difference was that the back was already hurting like the devil and I knew that each bout of cramp would only serve to increase the pain as the muscles tightened up and pressed harder on the trapped nerves. It really was very unpleasant. Perhaps the worst part was waiting for the next spasm - knowing how painful it was going to be when it came.

I took stock of my situation and I can remember thinking how suddenly disaster can strike out of a clear blue sky. I was now confined to my bunk - it was far too painful to move – whilst drifting in fog in one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world.

Fortunately I had brought the fog horn down into the cabin with me and after some time I managed to reach it on top of the sink unit. For a moment I considered getting out into the cockpit but I knew it would take ages to accomplish this and anyway the pain was too great when I tried to sit up. The only thing for now was to lie down on my bunk.

T'hat was how I spent the next 3.5 hours. Every two or three minutes or so I sounded the fog horn whilst listening to the other fog horns sounding around me. Altogether in that time there were four 'close shaves' as I remember and two or three mild scares. Few things in my life have frightened me as much as that did: lying on my bunk, powerless to affect my situation, while listening to the approach of a ship. The sequence was always the same. Gradually the fog horn would get louder and then I would hear the noise of the ship's engines. On four occasions the noise became really quite loud - and on one occasion I was almost certain that we were going to collide. On each of these four occasions the boat was thrown around shortly after the ship passed - which didn't help my back - and from this I could get some idea of how close we had been. With the closest one the boat rocked violently less than a minute after the ship passed.

It was about 1700 when I realized that I hadn't had cramp for some time - perhaps an hour or more. I decided to try and ignore this for the time being because last time the cramp had lasted nearly 48 hours and I couldn't believe that it would pass so soon. Fromthe Harrier log I knew we had been moving slowly during all this time at a speed varying between half and 1.5 knots. I could only hope that 'Puff' was still doing its stuff and keeping us on course. This was by no means certain because even the best self-steering gear can't cope if there's no wind. But it looked as if there might have

been just enough to keep us going; and certainly the sun, when it half appeared now and then through the fog , seemed to be roughly in the right place.

I realized by now that I was going to have to change my plans drastically. Now the aim was simple and direct: to survive.

Looking at the chart I could see that once I was clear of the shipping lanes I would be only some 25 miles from the coast. There were really three choices of port to make for. I could turn back to Corunna - but that would mean rounding Cape Finisterre inside the shipping lanes. I could make for Villagarcia - almost directly opposite where I thought I now was. This was a small fishing village within a large natural anchorage. Or I could make for Bayonna, a sheltered port of refuge in the entrance channel to the port of Vigo. This, I realized, would mean running the risk of meeting more ships coming out of Vigo. But I had to think about what would happen once I got into port. If this back of mine was still playing up I would need to be somewhere near civilization in order to get it sorted out - perhaps even to go to hospital again. Moreover, with any luck this fog would clear by the time I neared the coast. I decided I would try and make for Bayonna when I was able to do so.

An hour later, not only had I still not had cramp but the pain in my back had definitely eased. Of course I was desperate by now to get out into the cockpit but I had to balance this with the risk of starting the cramp again if I moved too soon.

I decided to take the risk. Five minutes later to my great relief I was sitting in the cockpit. Our course had been only 15 degrees out - which was remarkable - and we were still just barely moving through the water at half to 1.5knots. About an hour later I took a series of RDF bearings and firmly established my position. It seemed that I was now just on the landward edge of the shipping lane. More ships had passed me, two of them too close for comfort 3 but it was now beginning to look as though I would avoid collision after all. Another fix at 2100 hours, to my great relief, showed that we were some 5 miles clear.
Depressingly, we were still 25 miles from Bayonna because I had deliberately crossed the shipping lanes at right angles - the correct procedure – and this course .was nearly at right angles to our destination. Still, I thought, be thankful for small mercies. I cooked myself a meal, lit the Tilley lamp and kept sounding the fog horn every 5 minutes.

I realized I would have to stay awake all night - unless, of course, the fog lifted. For one thing I had to keep sounding the fog horn - or the whistle if the fog horn cylinder

ran out. For another I had to stay at the tiller ready to take avoiding action if I met any more ships.

I re-read the Pilot for Spain and Portugal, mainly to learn all I could about the approaches to Bayonna but also to look again at the section on climate where it discussed the incidence of fog. I had already been well aware that fog was common off the Spanish coast during July and August but now I was trying to discover how long it usually lasted. It didn't say. Anyway, for now I had my work cut out - tomorrow would no doubt look after itself.

It was a dreary night - and an exhausting one. The fog horn gave out just after 0500 after which I had to use the whistle. At no time, however, did I hear a ship close at hand, although I could still hear far away the mournful bleats of the fog horns out in the main shipping lanes behind me. I took RDF fixes every two hours or so - not because we were making any speed through the water but to guard against the effect of current – about which the Pilot was rather vague. By now I was using 2 beacons: Cape Finisterre and Cape Silleiro. The latter was the lighthouse positioned just at the entrance to the Vigo channel.

By 0643 hours next morning it was light, the fog was still with us and we were now some 17 miles from Bayonna. Progress during the night had been very slow. For long periods there had been no wind at all, while for the rest of the time we were making about half a knot through the water - not always in the right direction. Suddenly, at about 0750 the sun broke through the fog and in the space of half an hour or so the visibility improved to about 1.5 miles. Thank God, I thought. This decided me to do something which I had been considering right through the night, but hadn't dared to do: unreef the mainsail and set the genoa.

It turned out to be much easier than I had expected, even though the back was still very sore. But the near calm conditions helped and I had the job finished by 0845. Now, I thought, if the wind does get up I can expect to get moving properly.

However, it was not to be. Not only did the wind not get up, but at 0950 the fog returned again, even thicker than before. By now I was very, very tired and this unexpected development depressed me badly. Surely not another day of fog?

It was time to take stock of the situation again. I was very tired now and getting more so with every hour. The wind was still only force 1, if that, the sea was calm though with some swell, the fog was as thick as ever and I was now,by RDF, only 15 miles or so from Bayonna. I remembered what Reeds Almanac has to say about the use of RDF beacons, warning that it is poor seamanship to try and home on a single beacon in fog.

They are right, of course, but I happened to think that my particular situation made such a risk an acceptable one. The alternative was to remain hove-to off shore until the fog lifted (which in fact would have been 2 days later) with the shipping lanes on one side of me and the coast of Spain on the other, risking a collision and perhaps another bout of bad back. I decided to try and reach Bayonna and if possible to start the engine.

Quite apart from the obvious risk I ran in doing this, I was not too hopeful anyway about starting the engine. It had been reluctant to start the; day before, since when it had been soaked by the moist air. It started first time without the slightest trouble. I honestly believe somebody was helping me. We proceeded at 3.5 knots direct for Bayonna. Now I had to make my brain work clearly. First I took an RDF fix on Finisterre and Silleiro(Bayonna), noting the log as I did so. Then I checked what would be the bearing of Finisterre (which was at right angles to my course) when I was within half a mile of the coast. I noted that too. Thereafter I used the RDF every half hour until about 1250 when the fix indicated that I was only some 5 miles away from the Silleiro beacon.

While there was still time I sat in the cockpit studying carefully the large-scale chart of the Vigo channel and adjacent coastline. I saw that the lighthouse actually lay about half a mile south of the true entrance. In the intervening area a large number of rocks were shown. The entrance itself was about 2 miles wide, bordered on its northern side by more rocks and 2 or three small islands. It was not going to be easy. I decided my tactics as follows:

1. Make directly for the beacon.
2. On sighting land or rocks check the RDF bearing to establish the exact position of the lighthouse (which was on top of the headland and would probably still be hidden in fog).
5. Turn north for one mile on a bearing parallel to the coast. This should put me opposite the entrance.
4. Change course to take me into the channel.

Obviously the whole thing was risky, especially as I was now within 2 miles of the coast and the fog still hadn't lifted. In my favour, however, was the fact that the sea

Cape Silleiro lighthouse

was still calm, albeit with some swell, and my RDF was continuing to give me a very strong, clear signal. I also had a range check on my log together with the side bearing on Cape Finisterre.

Now I was using the RDF almost continuously, first on Silleiro my destination, then on Finisterre. Gradually the bearing on Finisterre closed to the one I had noted. Still the fog remained thick. It was difficult to estimate how far I could see now but I thought I would see a solid object of reasonable size at about 300 yards. Tricky.

It was at about 1510 that I began to hear a noise from dead ahead: a low growling sort of noise . It must be a ship, I thought, and strained my eyes to pierce the fog. Gradually the noise got louder. Then I suddenly realized what it was, even though I still couldn't see anything. Although the sea was calm there was a swell running about 12 - 15 feet high. What I was hearing was the sound of the swell washing up and down a cliff or rock. I suddenly felt very cold. Suddenly there they were - a group of two or three black rocks dead ahead with one or two other swirls in the water showing where other rocks lay just beneath the surface.

I resisted the temptation to change course for a moment because I had to try and discover where I was. One thing seemed clear: there was no cliff behind the rocks. Therefore, since I knew I must be close to the beacon, I deduced that these must be some of the rocks immediately to the north. Now I changed course to the south, running parallel to the rocks and taking another bearing on Silleiro light. Sure enough, the bearing changed quickly until it was exactly at right angles. I went on a bit just to make sure and the bearing started to draw aft. Now I knew where I was . I turned now onto the reciprocal course and again used the RDF until the bearing was exactly at right angles. Then I noted the log: 521.65. That meant I had to continue northwards until the log read 522.65 at which point I could - I hoped - turn eastwards into the channel. Slowly - I had reduced speed to 2 knots - the rocks came by again, then more - and more still. They looked dreadfully black and ugly as the sea rose and fell against their sides. The log clicked on so slowly that it seemed it would never reach my target. Now, thank goodness, there were no more rocks - which agreed with the chart. I felt fairly confident I was where I thought I was. Anyway, I thought, if I do meet more rocks after I turn eastwards I shall just have to turn round, make out to sea and just heave-to until this damnable fog lifts.

Bayonna (Baiona)

At last the log read 522.65. I let it go on a few clicks for luck and then turned to starboard. Now for it. I realized of course that my problems would by no means be over even when I entered the channel. Bayonna was still 2.5 miles away around the

headland and I knew I would have to feel my way round very carefully. Even so, once inside the rocks the swell should be considerably reduced and I had another 8 hours of daylight to find my way in. I had gone about a mile into the channel – far enough for me to know that I was on the right track - when to my enormous relief a small fishing boat appeared out of the fog about 200 yards away. I shouted across to then "Bayonna?", pointing to where I thought it was.

They couldn't hear and came closer. I repeated the question. This time they nodded vigorously and immediately turned their boat round, beckoning me to follow them. I did so with a feeling of enormous relief, as though a ten ton weight had just been lifted from my shoulders. It was this that made me realize just how screwed up my nerves had been over these last few hours.

The rest was pretty straightforward. By 1545 hours I was tied up to the marina pontoon at Bayonna - a flourishing Spanish holiday resort - and had rewarded the fishing crew with some tinned food and cigarettes - they refused to take any money at all. The log read 526.14 - which meant that I had covered about 551 miles by log from Plymouth. Later I measured the distance on the chart and found that the true distance was 564 nautical miles. With an elapsed time of 7 days and 9 hours this meant that my average speed made good throughout the entire trip had been 3.22 knots.

I won't bore you with the rest of the story. A telephone call to England told Mary that I was safe and well - and that my voyage to Brunei was cancelled. I was disappointed, of course, particularly that I had not even reached Gibraltar. But in the previous 56 hours I had received too many genuine danger signals to ignore them any longer. I realized once and for all that boats and bad backs do not mix - not, at least, for long distance single-handed sailing.

As for Mary, she was disappointed for me - bless her - but openly relieved that common-sense had at last prevailed !

As I write this back in Plymouth, Ian Dobbie and another of my officers, David Maxwell - are sailing *Ahura* back from Vigo. Originally I .had organised a professional yacht deliverer to do this but they were keen to do it themselves and since Ian is, as I said before, a qualified ocean racing skipper, I have allowed

them to go ahead.

So there it is. For me, something of a disappointment but fun while it lasted- most of it anyway. As for *Ahura*, she I suspect, is also a bit disappointed. But at least she has played with the porpoises in the deep. She will always remember that.

Ron Preedy

The winning Marcon trophy log entry for 1977