

Bastille Rally 2002

PHIL WHISTON's Marcon Trophy Winning entry for a singlehanded cruise from Christchurch to St Malo

It was in 1998 when a group of boats from Christchurch Sailing Club first decided to meet in France on Bastille Day. That trip was to St Malo. In 2002, having visited Caen, Paimpol and Treguier in the intervening years, five boats, including myself singlehanded in my Trident 24 *Glashen*, decided on a return visit.

I had hoped to leave earlier but the weather was unsuitable until the weekend of 6 July, which necessitated the first stop being Cherbourg due to the tides. Nick and Gill Woolley in *Woolley Knickers*, an Evolution 26, who were leaving at the same time made straight for Alderney, being faster and able to make it into Braye harbour before the tide turned.

Christchurch to Cherbourg 6 July

I departed Christchurch at 0610 in a light SW. The sky was overcast and the sea state slight. I motorsailed until 1700 before having a good sail into the West entrance to Cherbourg. Not much shipping was seen en route. I did pass quite close to the front of one westbound container ship but had no real problem.

Inside the breakwater two dolphins popped up to say "Hello and Welcome to France."

I tied up at about 2100 and was greeted by John Rowantree who had come over for the weekend



Glashen – bilge keeler No 144

on a friend's boat. It was nice to see a friendly face. Traditional Spaghetti Bolognese for dinner and to bed.

Cherbourg to St Peter Port 7 July

I made an early start to make the most of the tidal eddy off Cap de la Hague. It was a grey wet morning with a fresh south westerly and not an ideal start. I began the trip motorsailing towards Cap de la Hague. Quite a few yachts were going west.

The tide was good after Cap de la Hague and I turned down the Alderney Race at 0920. It was very rough (wind over tide) with unpleasant, intermittent rain with the wind bang on the nose. A sailing school yacht on the

same course was struggling and dropped its sails. I did the same, only for the wind to veer, so after a decent rest I went back to motor sailing.

It was about 1230 when Sark came into view. The sea was calming and the trip became a little more pleasant as Grand Amfrique and then Herm could be identified.

After dropping the French courtesy flag the halyard became jammed so I was unable to hoist the club burgee. I motored up the Little Russell which was now much calmer. Inside St Peter Port breakwater I sighted *Woolley Knickers* who had come up from Braye. After an hour or so's wait we went into Victoria Marina and found a finger pontoon. That evening I joined Nick and Gill for a meal at the Library Carvery.

I started the next day with a good breakfast at the Pier Café (£5.95 and £2.40 for two cups of tea) and had a slow start but eventually met up with

Nick. He had to go up his mast to sort out his wind indicator and then I climbed mine to sort out the flag halyard. I had lunch on board and then took a stroll around St Peter Port. Torrential rain began spent the evening with another Library Carvery and beer at the Royal Channel Island Yacht Club.

St Peter Port-St Malo 9 July

I departed at 0800. The wind was F5 SW and the weather cloudy with showers. It was fairly lively at first. Wooley Knickers left on the same course at about the same time and a French Sail Training vessel. I was reefed down with the No 2 Genoa and we were going well. The sea was moderate (Rather Rough in CI terminology) but visibility was good.

Passing Jersey I shook out the reefs as the wind dropped to WSW F4. I could see a few sails in the distance. By the NW Minquiers Cardinal Mark the wind was F3 and I set the full genoa and mainsail. I rounded the SW Minquiers By and about 10 miles from the Grand Jardin Lighthouse I started to motorsail in the now light winds.



St Malo: the old town and the Vaubin Basin

I dropped the sails at the St Malo Fairway By and identified the leading lights for the harbour. The opassage in was quite lively with French fishing boats departing St Malo. At the harbour entrance I (typically) met the Condor Ferry coming out.

I motored around for about half an hour waiting for the last lock to open. The St Malo waiting buoys are quite substantial affairs and I could not tie up singlehanded. Entered the lock at 2000 BST with three others without any difficulty. I tied up at an inside pontoon and went to find *Woolley Knickers* to say hello but after a quick meal went straight to bed, tired out.

St Malo 10 July

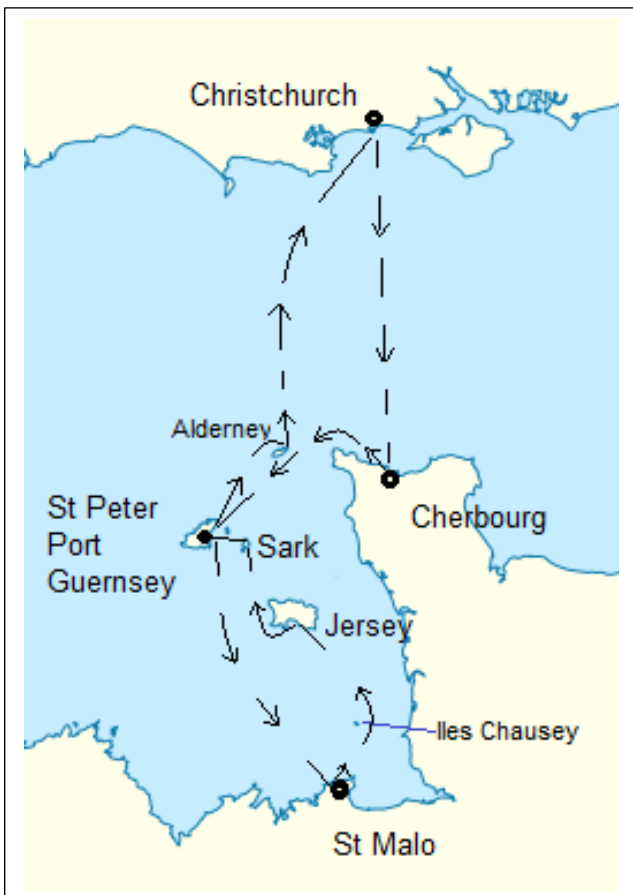
St Malo is always an interesting place with a lot of street entertainment and attractive shops,. The architecture of the old walled town has been carefully restored with great attention to detail after suffering terribly in World War 2 when it was almost completely destroyed by allied bombing.

In the afternoon I walked up the hill which overlooks the town and the Sablons Marina. Walking back, it began raining again.

Frances and Philip York from Christchurch aboard *Anatidae* came into the Vaubin Basin. In the evening sampled one of the the many restaurants and then one of the many bars feauturing live music. The band was obviously greatly influenced by the Police and the Beatles.

St Malo to Dinan 11 July

Departed through the ship lock at 0745 along with a tug, a fishing boat and six other yachts. The tidal barrage has the effect of delaying tides further up the River Rance. The best weather of





Looking down on the River Rance from Dinan

the trip so far greeted us as I motored through it with *Woolley Knickers*.

At Ploeur Marina we spotted Richard Thomson from Christchurch on *Kotick* and pulled in for a cup of coffee and a chat. A kestrel perched in a tree close to the pontoon attracted our interest.

Then we moved on to the next lock. At Dinan boats moor on a long pontoon along the river bank. We met there with Cliff Woolley from Christchurch who had motored over in his campervan and had an evening meal at the Bankside restaurant.

Walked the next day along the tow path to Abbey and a dilapidated fort. The countryside was very interesting and the walk very pleasant. Spent the afternoon exploring Dinan (reached up a steep walk from the river) which makes a contrast with St Malo. Dinan not having suffered much during the war, many of the buildings are still original and also show signs of their age in leaning at distinct angles. I climbed up the old clock tower which affords stunning views of the town. Evening meal with Nick and Cliff Woolley.

The following day I walked along the towpath on the other bank of the river to a quarry. It was a long walk back via Dinan and the Saturday market. Nick and Gill fed me on *Woolley Knickers* and we watched the Bastille Day fireworks.

Dinan to St Malo 14 July Departed at 0915 for Chartelier Lock. There was very little water on the down river side but managed to continue to the Barrage lock. We missed the first lock

which turned into quite a scramble when a trip boat took up about two-thirds of the space. We got through the second time at 1330 and then motored into Sablons Marina. Sablons is a much larger marina than the Vaubin Basin in the centre of the town. The facilities are very good and the marina can be entered at all tides except low water.

After sorting the boat out and having a quick lunch, I walked round the old town. St Malo was in full holiday mode with a squadron of NATO mine countermeasures ships in port to celebrate Bastille Day.

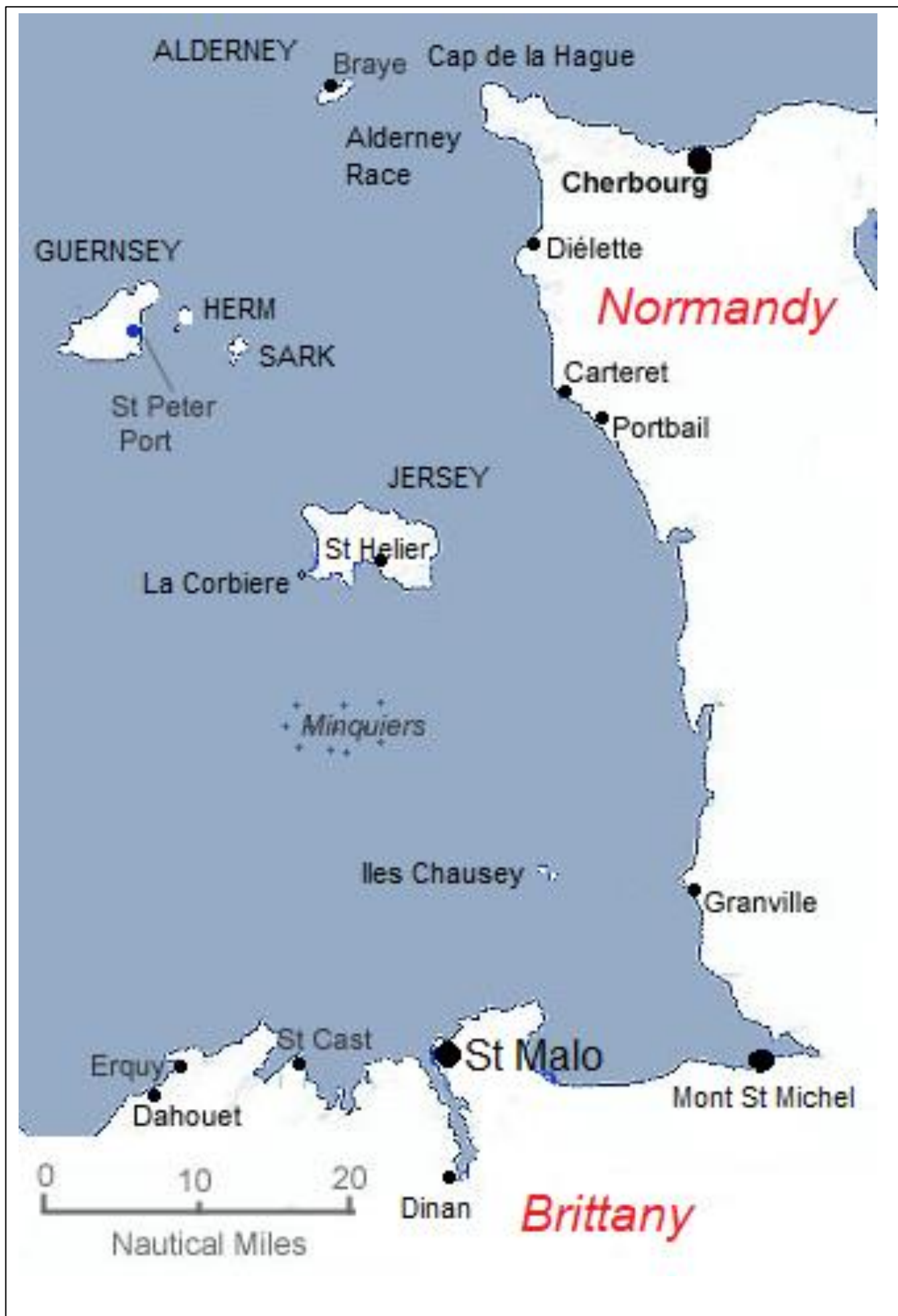
We met up with other Christchurch Boats enjoying the Bastille Rally (*Lmentary*, *Kotick* and *Anatidae*). Frances and Blue (from *Kotick*) arranged the evening meal, which was

excellent, and then we watched the fireworks from *Lmentary*. St Malo fireworks are always quite stunning. The evening was a great success.

St Malo to Jersey 15 July

I departed at 0700 as soon as I could clear the marina sill and initially made rather slow progress against the tide. It was overcast with a northerly F3-4 and the sea state was moderate. I was glad to be on my way though as through the VHF I became aware that there was quite a mele going on as the St Malo fishing fleet, six minesweepers and a fair volume of yachts tried to make their way through the ship lock. I passed Grand Jardin Light and began to sail at 1000. My course took me between the Minquiers and Iles Chausey, both of which could be seen. Iles Chausey are quite distinct and in the right conditions I would be interested in anchoring among them.





The Minquiers are much lower and a far more daunting prospect.

Good sailing from the Minquiers to Jersey where I entered La Colette waiting area and then on into the main marina. Found a very good Italian restaurant with the Thompsons and Yorks.

Jersey to Sark 16 July

After breakfasting in a café and provisioning in the Co-op I refuelled in the outer harbour. In the light NW F2-3 I motorsailed to La Corbiere Light after which the wind was right on the nose for Sark where I anchored close in under the cliffs of Dixcart Bay.

I went ashore for a walk, causing much amusement by walking with the dinghy on my head. Then went aboard *Kotick* for an excellent meal of fresh caught mackerel, washed down with gin and wine.

Sark to St Peter Port 17 July

Went ashore again and walked to Little Sark over the causeway constructed during WW2. Later I motored around the east and north coasts to take the Muse channel. The strong tides required careful planning. I stayed in the outer harbour at St Peter Port and dinghied ashore for another meal at the Library. Ok, not original but it is excellent value.

St Peter Port to Herm 18 July

Breakfast ashore and met up with another



Dixcart Bay, Sark

Christchurch Boat, Peter Davis on *Bellatrix*. I hummed and harred for a while about before deciding not to head back today but to investigate Herm. This is the first visit to that island by *Glashen* although I have been before on *Kotick*. I motored across on a rising tide using the Alligande

Passage and Vermier Beacon. I struggled a bit on my own tying up to the fore and aft chains [provided for visiting yachts on Herm Beach] but got her secure eventually with some help from a French family.

When the tide left us she was well high and dry on the beach for the rest of the day. I had a good walk on Herm which has a very special charm for me. Then dinner on the boat.

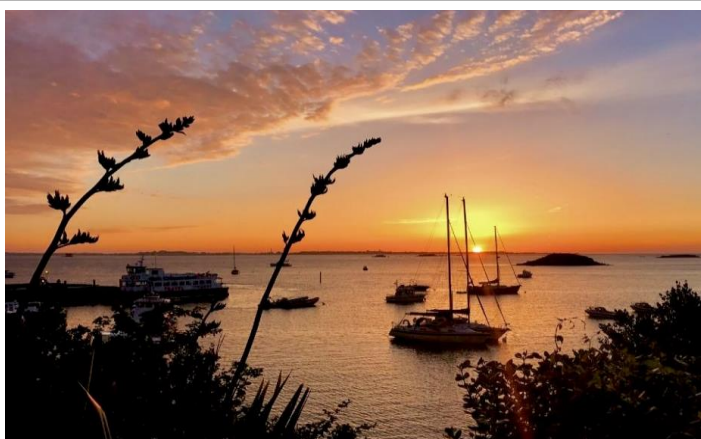
Herm to Alderney 19 July

I walked to St Tugal's church and on to Belvoir Beach and back over the top to the south side of the Herm island. I departed just before lunch, as soon as the water allowed at 1350, again taking the Alligande Passage into the Little Russell. I was on my way home now. The end of the holiday was close. I motorsailed into a fresh NE wind and it was quite choppy at the top of the Little Russell, but not too bad in the Swinge channel on the west side of Alderney. I got into Braye Harbour about 1800 and was met immediately by the harbour master. I had a good meal aboard and a quick trip ashore by watertaxi.

Alderney to Christchurch 20 July

I departed from Alderney at 0530 with a forecast of WNW F3-4, slight sea and sunny. There was little shipping and I had a good trip sailing most of the way. As always, this was quite a long day but was one of my best channel crossings to date. Came into the Dorset coast passing quite close to Anvil Point in a rising wind and had quite a ride eastwards across Poole Bay. I got into Christchurch around 2100 in time for a few pints of Ringwood at Christchurch Sailing Club.

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Herm Beach with Guernsey beyond