

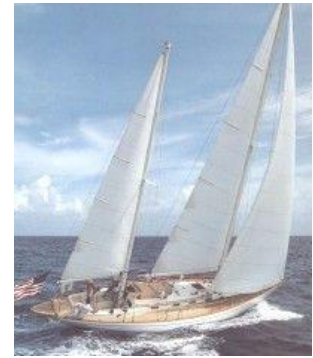
Miles of salt water

Rhode Island to British Virgin Islands



In November 2009 the MRSC Cruiser committee awarded me the Log Trophy, for the most miles sailed in the year. Engraved on it are my name, '2009', and '5018'. I am inordinately and indecently proud of this, and liable to go on and on about it. So when people say to me "oh, that's a lot of miles, was it somewhere nice, then?" I have to try VERY HARD to sound humble and nonchalant. But here goes...

In 2006, I think, my friend Nick (from the other Club) was talking of buying a classic yacht. He particularly liked the F&C44. *The what?* German Frers, the Argentine yacht designer, built a boat for his Dad, back in Buenos Aires. It was so nice, Alberto Cibil built another 50 or so, until the Falklands War put him out of business. It is 44 ft LOA (approx). Hence F&C 44. This is what it looks like. At anchor, people run their tenders round it and say "what a gorgeous boat, what is it"...

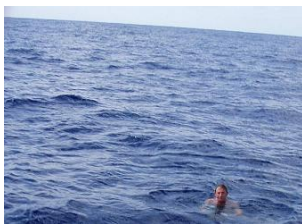


Ketch rig, very manageable, doesn't reverse very well under engine. Has an extra drop keel, for windward performance. Sails beautifully.



Anyway, he bought one. It was at Rhode Island, 25 years old, but in good condition. After some local shake-down cruises, he decided to sail her down to the Caribbean. *Would I like to come?* It all depends... maybe if my friend Graham were to take the minutes at the AGM... At dawn on the 14th October 2007 we set off, Nick, an American called John, and me. This is John. It was very cold, and very early.

We had a strong wind pushing us South. At one point we logged 13 Knots! The self-steering wasn't working, so it was a fun ride. We picked up a woodpecker that clung to the main boom for a few minutes, poor thing, before flying off and being lost forever.



Once we crossed the Gulf Stream, temperatures shot up. Unfortunately the wind died, too. We had a swim in an abyss 5,000 metres deep. Even I couldn't touch the bottom. A long way to the edge, too.

It took us 4 ½ days to reach Bermuda, where we had the self-steering sorted out, and swapped crews – John flew home, and two more Hayling men joined the boat, Peter and Martin. We went to see the weather man, who wouldn't give routing advice, but stuck religiously to the forecast. Here he is, broadcasting a forecast on the VHF.

In the end, we set off, uncertain if there was going to be a hurricane, where it would go and when.





Well, there was a hurricane, it was called Noelle, and it tracked clockwise round the southern Caribbean, arriving at Bermuda a week later!

By then we were arriving at Tortola, in the British Virgin Islands, having had a superb sail, with no problems. Glorious landfall. It couldn't be better.

But it was. Anchor off some green island, nobody else about, slide out of the bunk first thing in the morning, drop straight over the side, warm, sunny. Sail about: Virgin Gorda for provisions; snorkel round the rocks off Great Dog, saw some nice fish: blue tongue, sergeant major; ashore at Anegada, with its chameleon sanctuary and strange geology...



But then, fly home, via Antigua, its cricket pitch and its Sticky Wicket. New crew on board to sail the boat south.

*Rhode Island to Bermuda: 675M. Bermuda to Tortola, BVI: 860M.
October / November 2007 Total: 1,535M.*

Trinidad, Venezuela, Grenada



Nick and I flew to Trinidad a year later, 13th October 2008, taxi to Chaguaramas (honest!), where the boat was laid up over the hurricane season. The yard covered the boat with plastic sheets shrunk over conduit frames, very neat, and put an air conditioning unit in the main hatch, to stop things melting below. Slept on board. There was a storm brewing, but we launched two days later anyway, and motored across to a marina. When we walked to dinner a guard warned us about bandits in the area.

We had a day sail to test the waters, heard the howling monkeys in the jungle while anchored for the night, saw frigate birds, flocks of parrots, and frightened this pelican. We slipped our mooring one evening, and set course to the north under cover of darkness, to avoid the Venezuelan coast, and turned west later. Lightning, a heavy shower. Arrived at the Testigos islands early morning, and anchored off Iguana.



The Coastguard allowed us 48 hrs before Customs, so moved to Testigo Grande, where the few inhabitants live in a row of shanty houses along the beach. Explored the shore, spoke to fishermen sorting lines. My first time on South American soil in 44 years! Next day climbed the hill, got lost, stung by cactuses and mosquitos, and very thirsty. Benjamin saw us, and chopped open a couple of coconuts for us to drink with his old machete. He still has all his fingers! He gave us two snapper for our tea. A gent!

Off to Margarita. Quiet day, little breeze. We caught a King Mackerel, into the fridge. Not very tasty. Fan belt went, ghosted in to Porlamar bay and anchored among 90 other boats. Marina security was a big man called Pedro, who terrified even the locals, very effective. This was his "office". There were lots of tall buildings with wire fences, and hungry children lurking in the mangroves. Did a DIY tourist trail, some provisioning, but didn't like it ashore. Rumours of theft and piracy abounded.



Papers took 4 days to clear, so we lost interest in Venezuela and set sail for Grenada. Wind and current on the nose, took huge long tacks, motor sailed some. Arrived 48 hrs later, some rain and showers, but little traffic, and some brilliant sailing. Distinct feeling we were back in civilization. Provisioning, walk round St George's harbour, seen here, and off north.

Hugged the western coast, anchored overnight in a small bay. Next day sailed on, admiring the tropical forest, then past several islands and anchored off Saline, seen here. Swam ashore, lunch, then into Tyrrell Bay in Carriacou.



Earlier I realised that MRSC were having their AGM at that moment. Thanks Graham for taking the minutes for me!



There is a boat building workshop in Tyrrell Bay on a catamaran, seen here to the right of the yellow yacht.

After some fruit shopping ashore motor-sailed to Petite Martinique, near the northeast of Carriacou. While ashore there, saw a modern 35' motor cruiser disgorge a crowd of youngsters in uniform, back from school. Hayling Ferry plus plus!

Next day off to Tobago Cays. This is very close to Heaven. The reefs stop the big ocean swell all the way from Africa, but the steady breeze keeps the temperature just right. Big, open space. Swam among 6" fishes and a 2'6" turtle. Small bubbles in the water, maybe from the reef, but I believe I was swimming in Champagne. Words run out here.

Time to go south again. Next morning perfect breeze, full sail, past east side of Carriacou and back to Grenada, anchored in Port Halifax, and empty bay with power cables overhead. Quiet, heron, bats, tree frogs or cicadas singing away. Next morning motored south, into small bay with underwater statues, snorkeling. Bizarre!



Then back to St George's Harbour, stern-to.

Swop crews to take boat north again, fly home.

Trinidad, Venezuela, Grenada: 375M. Petite Martinique, Tobago Cays, back to Grenada: 96M. October / November 2008 Total: 471M.

Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Azores



Flew with Mike Foster to Tortola, to join Nick for the trip back home with ARC Europe. Preparations, briefings, day sails, food, stow tender, sea survival demo, fleet dinner, and we were off.

Grey, bumpy sea, strong breeze on the beam, course directly north. Then sun came out, cracking sail! Wind due to veer NNE so while we could we went slightly east of north.



The fleet scattered. Then the wind slowed down, lots of sunshine, so we had a swim.



We had one cold night, when the wind veered SW, then NNE, and next day we motored into Powder Hole, St George's Harbour, Bermuda. Five days' run. Lots of walking ashore, laundry, bus to Hamilton, coffee in the shade. Stern-to at St George's Dinghy and Sport Club. David Giffard joined us.

Mike had a lift in a tender to the airport, and flew home.



Provisioning, ARC briefings and dinners, rum-tasting event... and it was time to go. Strong NE breeze, rough seas. A French boat was dismasted the first night, but motored back OK. The fleet split up: some kept on easting, but we went north, then east along 36°N.

SSB often unreadable. No contacts on VHF, too distant. Emails via sat-phone worked OK, but the emailed weather briefings were confusing. Wind died down, came up again, veered, slow sail east. Then gale warning at 40°N, so we took heed. Some were caught in 40 to 50Kt winds, but not us. Rain, cold at times. Wind backed, and we had a long run, very rolly. The self-steering had to be watched in case of a gybe against the preventers.



First part of the fleet arrived, then our group at the back made it. This is David with Faial, Azores, our landfall, over his shoulder.

Met up with other crews ashore, went to Pete's Bar, dinners, the mandatory picture on the wall. That's me between the new picture (light green) and the Club burgee from 2004 on Celtic Silver. We bid farewell to the ARC and flew home via Lisbon. Taxi trip to the Nautical Museum in Lisbon was interesting.

Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Azores: 3,133M. May / June 2009.

Azores, Corunna, Brittany, Chichester Harbour



A few weeks later four of us flew back to the boat in the Azores. Couldn't find her at first, as the marina had moved her. Did lots of tinkering: oil change, new gas solenoid, sails bent on, and away.

Wind sensor didn't register on self-steering, fixed by greasing the mast-head contacts at Sao Jorge, next island, 22M away. Small harbour, drizzle, chilly night.



So, off to Angra do Heroismo, Terceira. Good sail, gust of 33Kts on quarter, took under 10 hrs, but not enough battery charging.



Had to climb over marina fence, as gate card key didn't register.

One of the crew sprang an infection. Hospital advised him not to sail for a few days, so he flew back home. Down to three again.

Electrician sorted alternator wiring and set up charger for 240v single phase. Batteries charged off shore power very quickly.

A few days of mostly ENE course, with variable winds, some light, some 30+Kts from astern, heavy rain one night, glorious sunshine to dry out in next day, and we were crossing the shipping lanes. Busy watches, Torre de Hercules in Corunna a good landmark. Shimmied into the big new marina, almost deserted. The old marina in town very full, and lots of car noise.



Huevos y bacon, and a walk in town. Great lunch. Went to Military Museum, much about German subs sunk off Corunna, and ancient gunnery computer, made in England. There were re-enactments of the retreat from Corunna in 1809 while we were there, which we missed. Great dinners, sangria, ice-cream, happy tourists.

More food and fuel, off across Biscay. Confused sea and wind, jerky ride first day. Single handed yacht race, but less traffic as we went on. Dolphins though! Buzzed by Cessna twin from French Coastguard. Arrived Gulf of Morbihan at night. Interesting navigation, strong currents, lots of shallows. Vannes by dawn, alongside by Capitainerie.



Wives came by car, John drove it back home. Two girls on board! Vannes nice old town. Breton bagpipes, good food. Two weeks of pottering, anchoring at Ile d'Arz, Le Palais at Belle Ile, Locmaria and Port Tudy on Ile de Groix, bay opposite Lesconil, via Penmarc'h to Audienne marina. Provisions, then Anse du Loc'h, along Raz du Sein to Le Conquet, a fishing port. Then L'Aber Wrac'h, Guernsey, Braye at Alderney, and Osborne Bay via Needles. First breeze in ten days! Next morning, Chichester Harbour. Home!

Horta, Sao Jorge, Terceira (Azores) to Corunna: 1,067M. Corunna to Vannes: 379M. Brittany, Channel Islands, IOW, Hayling Island: 343M. Total: 1,789M. July/August 2009.