

Sailing with a Rear-View Mirror

Ted & Diana Evans in Ragged Robin III

Ragged Robin's cruise in July of 2009 mainly consisted of fleeing from bad weather. The aim had been to get as far north as quickly as possible, explore the Frisian Islands and if there was time, to explore places we had not visited on previous cruises, even if this meant missing out obvious favourites.

The passage over, from Woodbridge Haven to IJmuiden was classic: choose a marginal weather forecast and go! The two of us can cope with 26 hour passages - but not so easily if one is laid low with sea-sickness. That left the skipper on the wheel for 24 hours solid with a quartering sea building up to sizeable proportions off IJmuiden and the autohelm unable to cope. We had to request permission to enter the harbour before we could find shelter enough to lower sail. It took a couple of days for our guts to recover; by then we were well up the Noordhollandsch Kanaal at delightful Zaanse Schans (Fig.1). Here the windmills are industrial mills, sawing logs, grinding pigments, pounding seeds for oil, surrounded by a reconstructed 19C village, including the first Albert Heijn (now a SuperMarket Chain) shop.

Then on to our first anchorage, in the Alkmaardermeer, to shelter from the next blow.

Delightful Alkmaar afforded the next shelter, and the opportunity to hear the oldest working organ in the Netherlands played in the Grote Kerk.

Then overnight in Den Helder before the short hop across to Oudeschild, on the most western of the Frisian Islands, Texel. We took almost the last vacant berth, as yachts poured in to escape the hooley forecast for the afternoon. Hiring bikes from the Marina store, we explored Den Burg and the highest point on the Island, called Hoge Berg (high mountain) all of 15 metres above sea level. The forecast for the next day was excellent, but F6 later. Virtually the whole harbour decamped, en route to Harlingen on the mainland, via the shallow channels across the Wadden (Fig. 2).

Harlingen is one of our favourite harbours, tucked up in the very friendly HWSV marina established in the old town marine defences. It is a short distance from our favourite Fish Restaurant: De Tjotter, not to be missed.

The weather deteriorated again, and it was clear that sailing outside the mainland was out of the question, so inland, down the canals we go, first down the new mast up route south of Leewarden to Grou (try that route on your chart plotter!). This is where the rear-view mirror comes in handy (Fig. 3)!



Figure 1. Windmills of Zaanse Schans



Figure 2. Everyone fleeing the next blow across the Wadden to Harlingen.

Our favourite spots in this area are Earnewald and the Heegermeer, both hewn out of peat like our Norfolk Broads but on a much grander scale. Anchoring in the Grote Gaastmeer, with plenty of shelter, was a delight after a white-out across the Heegermeer.

The 6 hourly forecasts, in synthesised English, of the Dutch Coast Guard are excellent in location and accuracy, the first at the convenient local time of 0805. But we had a new phrase: "thunder atmospheric disturbance" on top of SW 5-6 occasionally 7 to worry about. So deeper we head into the canals, through Woudsend, the Slotermeer and Tsjeukermeer to Steenwijk for the night. Thames had WSW 5-7 becoming 8; we were given SW 7. Some of the longer straighter canals had a nasty fetch, but we battled on to Kampen, an old Hanseatic port originally on the Zuider Zee. This was before the eastern polder of Flevoland was reclaimed, creating the Randmeren - a

narrow very sheltered channel on what was the old eastern shore of the Zuider Zee but still retaining the lovely harbours of Kampen, Elburg, and Spaakenburg. Our stay in the last coincided with the first of their Spaakenburg Days - a huge street fair surrounding the traditional wooden fishing boats crammed into the tiny old harbour, and populated by locals in traditional costumes.

Next day, the wind moderated so we could tackle the south end of the Zuider Zee across to Amsterdam, where we stayed in the Aeolus Marina, east of the more familiar Sixhaven to avoid the noise of the construction works on the N-S underground line. The point of this visit was to go round the Rijksmuseum closed when we last visited 5 years ago for refurbishment. Still closed (apart from a selection of the great collection of paintings), in spite of the huge "Open" sign across the front! Compensation was afforded by the spectacular new Hermitage Museum showing a changing exhibition of Russian treasures.

By now the weather was definitely improving and words like "actually not raining" and "Nice Day" appear in the log, as we sped westwards to the complex of canals passing through Haarlem, another favourite. We joined, as the only two native English speakers, a group of enthusiastic Haarlemmers in a "scratch" sung Anglican Evensong in the Bavokerk, accompanied by the world-famous fabulous organ on which the 11 year old Mozart played.

Having kept on pushing on, we were now ahead of schedule and a side trip could be made to Leiden from the southern end of the



Figure 3. Rear-view mirror, strategically situated between the coffee mug holders.



Figure 4: In the Nieuwehaven, Dordrecht.

Kagerplassen: Broads-like waterways and lakes. From Leiden we took the train to the equally quaint Delft.

Then on to another favourite, Dordrecht (Fig. 4), mooring in the Nieuwehaven, the middle harbour further away from the Grote Kerk's carillon playing every quarter an hour - but not during the night.

Another side trip followed - down the Spui into the Haringvliet, to Hellevoetsluis which we had not visited before. We even went swimming! Then on to anchor in the Gravelingermeer in the shelter of an island.

Zierikzee was the next stop, before leaving the interior at the Roompot Sluis and a comfortable passage to Blankenberge, choc-a-block full. By now, we were into August and the build up of the high pressure system over the UK. This resulted in a lovely passage back across the N Sea bringing up under anchor in the Walton Backwaters after a 661M cruise. Surrounded by beauty and curlews - and lovely weather, as always we asked ourselves "why ever do we go away?"

