

Flamingo Goes Dutch

The plan for summer 2016, hatched in the depths of a long, dull grey winter was to head for the Netherlands. A second reading of *The Riddle of the Sands* had sown the seeds of a plan to visit the Dutch Frisian Islands. Having never crossed the North Sea other than in a ferry, and never sailed outside of the UK's territorial waters there was clearly a lot of planning to do. Appended is a list of the many mandatory and advised pieces of documentation that I discovered through hours of research. Here is a list of the paperwork that we needed; passports. I bought a copy of Brian Navin's *Cruising Guide to the Netherlands*, which was useful. I should have bought a copy of the same author's *North Sea Passage Pilot* which I have since discovered is essential. Finally, a plan was settled, Lowestoft to IJmuiden, Amsterdam, Markermeer, IJsselmeer and a brief visit to Texel before returning home.

Brancaster Staithe to Lowestoft 66NM

Regular crew Nigel and Tony travelled from Lincoln in the ancient VW and we were aboard with gear stowed as we settled down to a Thai curry for supper ready for the adventure to begin. Sadly, the wind refused to cooperate in the morning and we motor-sailed almost all of the way to Lowestoft in light E and later NE winds.

Lowestoft to Southwold 10NM

We had agreed that we were going to sail to Holland, not motor, so easterlies on July 23rd left us with little option but to postpone the crossing for a day. Inspired by Sanderling's success we sailed very slowly down to Southwold (again in light NE winds), a harbour with a reputation that had prevented us from visiting in previous years. With the guidance of the very helpful harbour master we entered two hours before HW without issue although it is essential to stick to the recommended track. Southwold really is a lovely harbour and a fascinating place to visit. Following recommendations we had planned to purchase charts on arrival in IJmuiden and the skipper of a Jeanneau that we were rafted outside loaned us his excellent 1800 series charts which I determined to purchase on arrival in IJmuiden. An afternoon spent provisioning interspersed with the occasional pint had us ready for the off. After an evening's meticulous passage planning we were as ready as we were ever going to be. Departure was planned for 1600 the following day with plans for a 24 hour crossing in the forecast southerly F4 to F5 (there is a God!).



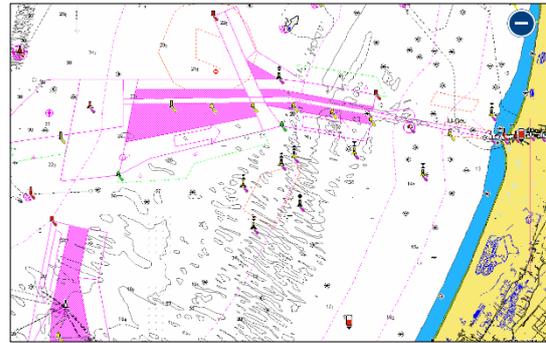
Southwold to IJmuiden 116NM

Our meticulously planned passage demanded a 1600 departure, but the boat inside us needed to be off by 1000 so rather than rig a fender board and re-moor we decided to set

off, that was our first mistake. The passage from Southwold to Ijmuiden basically requires you to steer 090°M and let the tides push you alternately north and then south until you arrive, mistake number two.

We made cracking progress beam reaching in southerly F4-5 winds with two reefs in the main, logging 35nm in the first six hours. At around 1700 hrs we entered the first of the Deep Water Channels that we had to cross. Having set off early we had been pushed further south than we would have liked which meant

crossing the DWC at a junction which was rather more challenging than we had hoped. Careful use of the AIS (brilliant), radar and compass equipped binoculars enabled us to develop a workable collision avoidance strategy. From 2300 until dawn things got a bit messy, our early departure had left us tackling the 'veritable Spaghetti Junction of DWCs and



TSSs' described in the *North Sea Passage Pilot* in the dark and our most tired state. One log entry in spidery writing reads 'chasing about in the dark avoiding ships!'. By 0140 the electronic wizardry was taking its toll on the batteries so we motor sailed for an hour. A grey and misty dawn revealed a huge wind farm and finally our first sight of the Dutch coast.



Having waited for a DFDS ferry we finally spoke to Ijmuiden Traffic Centre, entered the port and made our way round to the Marina where we were advised to tie up anywhere on Mike pontoon. Ijmuiden Marina is huge, with plenty of space for visiting boats, in fact it was about a ten minute walk around the pontoon to the harbour office.

Looking back, our first North Sea crossing went well. We were never in danger of a collision, or even impeding the progress of any other vessel. We should have been stricter with our watch system, and the skipper should have slept in the daylight and not caved in at 0230. Our planning needed to take greater account of the DWCs and TSSs, we should have planned to use the tides better to deliver us to our chosen crossing points. The AIS (built into a Standard Horizon 2200 VHF Radio) was worth its weight in gold.

At the harbour office we paid our €20.50 and armed with a vast folder of documentation asked about immigration. 'You fill in this form and stick it in the box, if immigration want to they will visit you'. We never heard from immigration and this was the last time we needed any of our documentation, nobody even looked at our passports.

We borrowed (note borrowed, not rented) Dutch bicycles for a ride into town to buy charts where we were told that the 1800 series that I wanted did not exist so I parted with what felt like a lot of Euros for what looked like a road atlas. Over time I have come to love my Dutch NV chart atlas, it is printed on beautiful paper, corrections arrive monthly via e-mail and entering the code in your iPad or PC installs a fully functioning plotter complete with AIS capability. Their folio covers the North Sea and east coast of the UK and I'm seriously considering adding them to my folio. Two thirds of the crew stopped on a downhill section on the way back to the marina but Tony sailed past shouting 'I can't stop the bloody thing', back pedal brakes are an acquired taste.

Ijmuiden to Amsterdam 13NM

This phase of the journey held more fear for me than the North Sea crossing; locks, canals, commercial traffic and an unknown marina in the middle of a city. It really couldn't have been easier. The sun shone, the wind didn't blow so we motored and the whole trip was a dream. Out of Ijmuiden at 1050 and into the Kleine Sluis with about 10 other yachts. The locks are smooth sided with ample bollards in the walls, everybody is very helpful and there is virtually no rise or fall so no unpleasant turbulence. The Nordseekanal is wide and straight with plenty of room to be passed by the constant commercial traffic from ferries and barges, up to cruise liners. By 1420 we were snug in the new Amsterdam Marina, as we tied up the skipper of the yacht in front rushed over, shook our hands and wished us 'welcome in Amsterdam'. The marina is immaculate with a lovely restaurant and bar area, and showers to rival any hotel that I have ever stayed in. All for €20 per night, UK marinas note, that's £18 with a free foot ferry to the centre of Amsterdam.



Having caught up with a bit of sleep we got our glad rags on and headed across to Amsterdam centre on the foot ferry. Amsterdam at night is unique, so busy but so few cars; bicycles and trams everywhere. We were like three old duffers trying to avoid being run

down while taking in the sights, sounds and smells. We located a lovely canal side bar where we tackled a number of Leffes followed by excellent burgers and contentedly wandered back to catch the last foot ferry, slightly daunted by the water traffic around the central station that we would be passing in the morning.

Amsterdam to Marken 24NM

Readers of last year's St Kats log will be aware that Flamingo occasionally flies a squid wind sock off the back stay, much to the annoyance of the mate. If the skipper had been concentrating he would have spotted that the squid was still up as we departed Amsterdam Marina, and that it had swum twice round the backstay and was stuck. Anyway we traversed the centre of Amsterdam with the skipper stood on the transom with the boathook removing the errant cephalopod. Passing through Amsterdam we had a look at the Sixhaven Marina which used to be the main city centre marina, it looked rather more 'funky' than the luxury of the Amsterdam Marina. An hour later having dodged the city centre traffic we were in the easily



managed Oranjesluizen, through the Schellingwouderbrug and out into the Markermeer. We were soon making good speed running before a southerly F3 flying Sanderling's spinnaker which conveniently mirrored the colours in our Dutch courtesy flag. A significant darkening of the skies to the south had us handing the spinnaker just before we were hit by a squall that was easily managed under white sail but would have been problematic with the kite up. A squally wet sail round the top of the former island had us arriving in Marken harbour by 1645.



Marken used to be an island before the dams separated the Markermeer from the open sea, at which point a causeway was built connecting it to the mainland. The northerly section of Marken harbour is free to visiting boats for three nights and there was a boat leaving as we arrived so we were soon tied up alongside the stone wall. Wet and tired we bought some little Dutch doughnut like pancakes and huddled below decks with a coffee to warm up. The area around Marken harbour is almost like a Disneyland



representation of an old Dutch harbour, almost impossibly picturesque, albeit slightly spoiled by a constant flow of coach trips.

We spent two nights and part of three days exploring the island and provisioning on foot and using our bike while we planned the next phase of our trip. The route north through the IJsselmeer to Texel and hence home started to look a bit optimistic given crew commitments at home and the threat of strong winds later in the week so we made the decision to return via Amsterdam.

Marken to Amsterdam 26NM

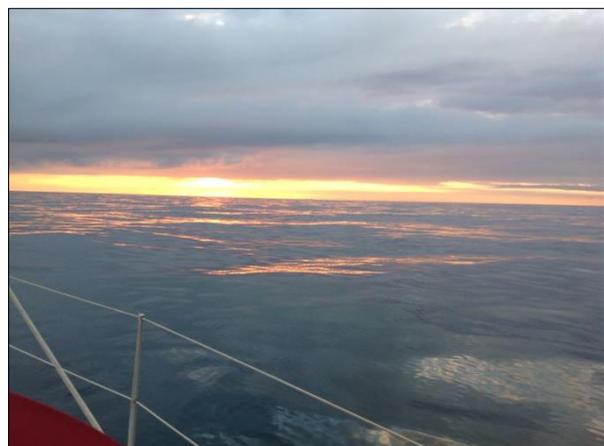
After an interesting departure from inside a rafted boat that was unable to move due to a flat battery we were soon heading south again enjoying a cracking five hour beat in southerly F4-5 winds. Reversing our passage through the Schellingwouderbrug and Oranjesluizen we were entertained by a young lock attendant who advised us to 'hold tight, we are going down a whole 20 centimetres'.



We enjoyed an excellent Italian meal at a lovely restaurant in Amsterdam on our final evening in the Netherlands and again caught the last foot ferry to the marina.

Amsterdam to Ramsholt 142NM

Given that it was only two hours from Amsterdam Marina to the open sea at IJmuiden we decided to depart from Amsterdam, setting off a little earlier and preparing the boat and eating breakfast on the way down the Nordseekanal. As we approached the Kleine Sluis at IJmuiden we decided to call them up on the VHF as it wasn't busy and we hoped they might have the lock open when we arrived. Their response was a fairly emphatic put down, 'yacht approaching the lock, when the light is green you may enter the lock'. The forecast had been for variable winds F1-3 so we were hoping for it to be more F3 than F1, we were to be disappointed. The engine went on at 0700 on Saturday 30th July and finally went off at 0445 on Sunday morning, the best breeze we saw on the majority of the crossing was F2. After all of our planning and worry about our first North Sea crossings it was very odd to motor home in glassy seas with the slightest swell imaginable. To add insult to injury the wind finally filled in to F4-5 from the NW as the tide set in from the north pushing us well south of our original destination of Lowestoft. All good passage plans have alternative ports so we diverted south



towards Harwich, hoping to get into the Deben if the tide allowed. Once we were committed to heading south west the wind backed to westerly and we had a tough beat to the Deben entrance and were on a buoy at Ramsholt by 1227; very, very tired. After a well-earned sleep we pumped up the Avon and rowed ashore for a very enjoyable final meal at the much improved Ramsholt Arms.

As we ate we reflected on our little cruise. We had certainly achieved our objective, the boat and crew proved to be fully capable of making the trip and there was even talk of a return trip with the new crew arriving later in the week. You could spend weeks happily hopping from pretty port to port in the Markermeer and IJsselmeer. The locks and canals are all easily navigated and the marinas that we visited were all interesting, well run and cheap. With a smaller or less capable crew the shorter Harwich to Oostende crossing might be tempting, and better route planning would avoid some of the issues of DWCs and TSSs in the dark. Next year? The Netherlands again I think, unless I get very bored over the winter in which case.....

Documentation

This is a full list of the documentation that appeared to be essential before setting off.

- SSR
- Ships Radio Licence
- Personal Radio Licence
- CEVNI Certificate
- Boat Insurance (Check cruising range)
- Proof of VAT Status
- Evidence of qualifications (ICC minimum)
- Passport
- EHIC
- Health Insurance
- Log Book
- NL Crew list
- RAINWAT Document
- ATIS Licence
- VHF Ch31 Variation
- ANWB Almanac