A Scilly Affair

Chris Stevens, Co-Owner of Osprey RIBS, muses and enthuses about a memorable visit spent in and around the Isles of Scilly …

SUMMER CRUISE SCILLY'S

THE THING ABOUT building RIBs for other people is you don't get to enjoy spending much time on them, i.e. time for your own benefit! Throw in busy family lives and other commitments and it's easy to miss out on the pastime that gives us all the most pleasure – mucking about on boats! So when the chance to go on a three-day trip arises, it has to be taken.

As with all trips, the first step is to agree on a destination. Previous years had seen trips planned from Portishead to the Camel Estuary via Lundy for breakfast, or along the south coast to Salcombe. However, this year we decided that the Isles of Scilly were top of the list.

Most of the passages to the Isles of Scilly that I have read about have involved departing the south coast and heading out past The Lizard, then on towards Wolf Rock Lighthouse. However, being great fans of the North Cornish coastline, we decided to set out from Rock (on the opposite side of the Camel Estuary to Padstow) and sail down past Newquay, St Ives and Sennen Cove before heading out towards the Islands with Longships Lighthouse off the port bow.

So with the plan agreed, we set a date (and a couple of reserve weather dates) in the

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Morred up at Old Grimsby

diaries in order to obtain the necessary passes from the Home Office. Travelling down to Rock the evening before we departed gave us a clear three days to get away from the daily grind, and after the three-hour drive down from our Gloucestershire base, the feeling of relaxation as we sat in the Mariners pub overlooking the Camel Estuary was perfect. A calm, still evening boded well for the following day, when we planned to launch first thing in the morning.

So it was, early on a calm sunny day in late June, that we rolled the latest version of our 6.8m Osprey Vipermax off its trailer and into the smooth waters of the Camel Estuary from the beach next to the Rock Sailing and Waterski Club. Before launching, we had grabbed the obligatory bacon roll from the Rock Bakery and a few pasties for lunch. Having dropped the trailer up the road to G.B. Smith & Son (a local boat storage yard), we pushed off from the beach, fired up the new Evinrude E-TEC G2 200 H.O. and idled out past the Camel Ski School pontoon. This was our longest run yet with the all-new version of the E-TEC, and having spent a lot of time prop testing and setting the optimum

Raven's Porth - Tresco

height of the engine, we were very interested to see how it performed over a long run with a heavily laden RIB. The 75 nautical miles that lay ahead of us would be a great opportunity to assess its performance.

After using the Icom IC-M400BB 'black box' VHF to notify Falmouth Coastguard of our departure and intended arrival time at St Mary's, we headed out of the Camel Estuary with the Doom Bar to port and the anticipation of the passage ahead of us. And as we cleared the relative calm of the Estuary, we were relieved to see the north coast was 'playing ball' with a 1- to 2-metre swell and light chop, meaning the conditions were ideal for giving boat and engine a good test without turning the journey into an endurance trip. So we throttled up passing Trevose Head and set off down the coast, the Vipermax hull skipping across the swell at a steady 30-knot cruising speed and the Ullman suspension seats providing a relaxing and comfortable ride.

Making good time and after a brief pit stop at St Ives, we continued down the coast

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KEELGUARD

Last issue's competition winner was Paul Upward from Purley, Surrey.
Paul won our Keelguard competition (page 22 of Issue 128) and has chosen the white Keelguard as his prize.

For full product info, go to http://www.gmtmarine.co.uk/index.php/products/keelguard.html

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past the old tin mines and the beautiful Sennen Cove before heading out towards the Islands. Clearly we had got the weather window right on the button as the conditions remained relatively calm, so we were able to maintain 25 to 30 knots, with the Lenco trim tabs providing a bit of extra help balancing the boat due to our uneven load with three heavyweights on board. As we left the coast behind us, the feeling of freedom as we lost sight of land came over all of us and it seemed the perfect time to kill the engine and enjoy one of life's greatest pleasures – the good old Cornish pasty, arguably the best food for taking on a RIB!

TRIP STATS

Distance travelled: 75nm each way and about 35nm over 2 days around the Islands

Fuel used: Fuel averaged at 1.01 litre per nm

With the Islands now in sight on the horizon, the sea had calmed to the point where we were able to maintain 40 knots, and we were pleasantly surprised to see the fuel consumption from the frugal E-TEC only just starting to drop below 1 litre per NM. With the tide at its high point we decided to wend our way round the top of the Island through the various islets such as Mouls, Irishman's Ledge, Little Ganilly and a number of other interestingly named obstacles – definitely not an advisable route in poor visibility, but on a calm, sunny day, not to be missed.

As we cruised down between Tresco and St Mary's we called the coastguard to confirm our arrival, and then, as Hugh Town Harbour approached, we spoke to a friendly harbour master on Channel 14 who directed us to drop our bags on the pontoon and then grab one of the harbour's many inflatable tenders from the pontoon and tow it out to any mooring that was free.

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Having done this, we rowed back in and tied up the tender before strolling along the harbour wall past the Mermaid pub to the Tregarthen's Hotel – all of 60 yards from the pontoon! I think it's fair to say that the time between dropping our bags on the pontoon, mooring up and rowing the tender back to the pontoon, walking up to the hotel to check in and drop off our bags, and meeting back at the Mermaid for a pint was about 20 minutes – the beauty of a small island! Among the many things that make the Islands such a great place for

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The Mermaid is what all pubs should be. An eclectic mix of memorabilia covers every square inch of the pub, and all of it has a story to tell. It is a busy, friendly pub with locals and visitors, including numerous sailors of different nationalities rubbing shoulders at the bar. So as we sat enjoying our first cider, we made the decision to capitalise on our early start and head out for a spot of fishing before we got too settled into the atmosphere of the pub. We retired from the Mermaid into the afternoon sun and set off for Hangman Island between Tresco and Bryher, which had proved fruitful on a previous trip … Armed just with some light spinning rods and Dexter Wedges for jigging, it was not long before we had taken a couple of 3–4 lb pollock. After a quiet spell, we then moved further on between the two islands to Shipman Head, where the water shelves off quickly to over 40 metres within a few yards of the shore. As we drifted over the ledge we had a couple more pollock and also a couple of very colourful wrasse, again just jigging with

Raven's Porth - Tresco

Wrasse Guy

Sitting with the evening sun warming our backs and fishing rods in our hands, we couldn't think of anything more relaxing!

Raven's Porth - Tresco

lures. Sitting with the evening sun warming our backs and fishing rods in our hands, we couldn't think of anything more relaxing!

We awoke the next morning to rain as expected from the forecast, and used the excuse to have a leisurely start to the day, which consisted of a great breakfast at the hotel, several cups of coffee and then a stroll along to the local sports shop, which had a reasonable array of fishing tackle and various lures. After adding a few more colourful items to aid our piscatorial pursuits, we watched as the rain cleared and gave way to a beautiful sunny day, exactly as the forecasts had predicted. We made our way back to the pontoon, topped up the fuel tank at Sibley's on the harbour wall for a very reasonable £1.41 a litre and then set off for some more fishing. Clearly the fish were not impressed with our new lures, and after a couple of hours with nothing to show for our efforts except a small shad, we decided to head for the Ruin Café on Tresco Island overlooking Raven's Porth, a beautiful white sandy beach that gently slopes away into crystalline green water. Having tied up to the harbour wall, we were soon relaxing outside the Ruin enjoying some mixed tempura seafood, delicious crab sandwiches and authentic stone-baked pizza from the wood-fired oven. The view from the Ruin across the bay towards Tean and St Martin Islands was breathtaking. In fact, if you want to see for yourself, there is a webcam mounted on the Ruin Café that looks out across the beach: http://www.tresco.co.uk/webcams/. We got chatting to the manager of the café, who showed us the evening specials they were serving later in the day, and we were sold, deciding to come back for supper later on!

… when you want to unwind and get a couple of days away from life, there really is no better place than the Isles of Scilly.

We spent the afternoon cruising round the various islands and testing out some new fishing spots, and we found a few more areas where unsuspecting wrasse and pollock were hiding out in the kelp. Then we made our way back to the hotel to clean up before heading over to Tresco in the evening sun to sample some more of the Ruin's superb menu, with surf and turf, Tresco style (steak and lobster), high on the list.

Leaving Tresco at about 10pm, the gentle cruise back to Hugh Town for a nightcap at the Mermaid with our designated helmsman, Guy, at the wheel was truly the highlight of the day for me, with just a hint of the evening sun still reflecting off the clouds in the distance and a still calm over the sea. The perfect end to a perfect day – there really is no better way to travel …

Sadly, our brief interlude was almost over, and as we left Hugh Town the next morning we looked back wistfully and agreed that when you want to unwind and get a couple of days away from life, there really is no better place than the Isles of Scilly.

I think this may well become an annual trip! PBR

PLACES TO STAY

The Star Castle Hotel
Hugh Town, St Mary's

Tregarthen's Hotel
Hugh Town, St Mary's

Schooners Hotel
Hugh Town, St Mary's

Bryher and **Tresco** have various accommodation options, including cottages, chalets and a great campsite.

PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK

The Mermaid Inn - St Mary's
The Ruin Café - Tresco
Atlantic Inn - St Mary's
Fraggle Rock Bar - Bryher

TECHNICAL INFO

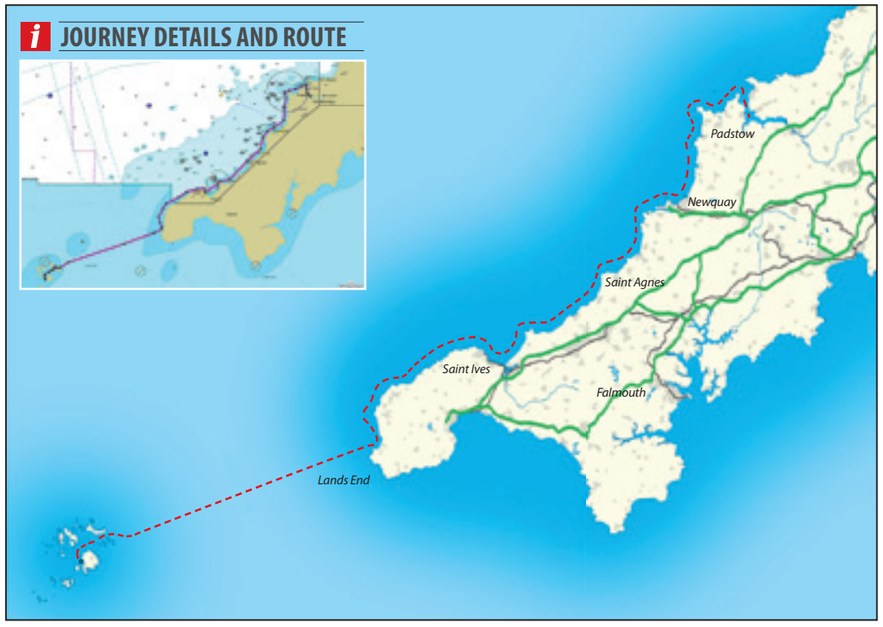
Boat: Osprey Vipermax 6.8 – Osprey's most popular hull, the Vipermax, in its 6.8m form. The deep, warped V with rear planing pad gives a great combination of rough-water capability and handling when at speed. A true all-rounder.

Engine: Evinrude E-TEC G2 200 H.O. – The new E-TEC demonstrated superb fuel and oil consumption on the trip despite a heavily laden RIB, and certainly the torque and hole shot one gets from the G2 have not suffered, and in fact, this aspect of the engine feels even more improved from the original version, which was no slouch itself. The Dynamic Power Steering (DPS) is superb and can be set up for different levels of feedback to match the user's preference.

Seating: Ullman suspension seats – The Ullman Biscaya seats, fitted with custom-made seat covers, have already proved themselves in a variety of conditions, and for anyone thinking about long-distance RIB cruising they are certainly worth considering.

GPS: Lowrance HDS 10 Gen 2 – Huge, crystal-clear display, and while not a touch screen, very intuitive to use and possibly more suited to the wet environment of an open boat. The Navionics Platinum Map Card provided accurate and detailed information as usual, combined with satellite imagery and pictures of approaches and harbours.

VHF: Icom IC-M400BB 'black box' – The 'in console' transceiver keeps your console space free of clutter, and the command microphone is superb for RIB use as the user can hold the handset to their ear in noisy/windy conditions when any kind of conversation with a normal VHF is virtually impossible.

View from St Mary's

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