


A Pregnant Pause





Tim Good had planned a trip to the Arctic Circle but, as the poet Burns once said, the best laid plans often gan agley. In the end, Tim was happy with an adventure in the Isles of Scilly

Avid readers of the magazine may recall that in a Previous article published in November 2020 I singlehanded my boat, Shadowfax, to Madeira as part of a trip back to the UK. My partner Emmie and I had decided, that due to Covid, Brexit and trying to start a family, we'd be better off enjoying 'local adventures' for a few years. The original plan was to go to Svalbard and with much of the preparation work done by Christmas, we discovered Emmie was pregnant on New Years day 2021! A thousand things ran through my mind and I'm ashamed to admit, for a split second, I knew the trip to Svalbard was off and was disappointed! A split second later we were obviously both ecstatic.

But what now? The boat is ready. Where can we go that will provide gentle walks, easily sailing, clean air, plenty of good food and of course, a good midwife! The Isles of Scilly of course! In fact, as it turned out, the care we received by the midwife in Hugh Town was exceptional and far beyond the care we got on the mainland. It is interesting the different points of view you get when you live on a boat. When we told the Bristol midwife we were going to the Isles of Scilly we got and earful;

"What! You're on a boat!?
Where? You can't do that!"

But on meeting the midwife in the Isles of Scilly:

"Oh I've delivered babies on all sorts of boats over the years"

So we rented our house out and got back on board in March. The boat was ready for the Arctic so a little chilly spring weather was nothing for Shadowfax in her current state; insulated with an efficient heating system. Oh and I have a special weapon for the cold... a little 12v electric blanket which I put on 10 minutes before bed to take off that nip you get one first entry into your bunk! I'm becoming soft aren't I!

Wild west country

We cruised the coast of Cornwall for around four weeks enjoying empty anchorages, amazingly still weather and all the blooming flowers that Cornwall has to offer in →

spring. The Helford was particularly nice and the gardens of Durgan and Trebough were in full glory, as were all the walking paths with wild garlic and bluebells galore.

Whilst in Falmouth, taking provisions, we anchored off Flushing, rowed ashore and did walk to Mylor via Trefusis and Penarrow Point. Some of you will know the loop well. We wanted to check out Mylor boat yard since Emmie was due in early September and we wanted a safe, secure and sheltered boat yard to lay up Shadowfax for 18 months. On returning to Mylor, the tide had come in and cut off the beach on which we'd left the dinghy! Ok, ok but we've all done it, right?

We knocked on the door of one of the gloriously large houses that overlook Falmouth and an elderly, but rather sprightly chap answered the door!

"I'm terribly sorry but can we cut across your garden to reach our dinghy?"

"Oh your a sailor, which boat is yours and where are you headed?"

"We're just down there and we're sailing for the Scilly Isles tomorrow"
"Oh well in that case you'll need to buy a copy of my anchorage guide... a signed copy of course"

David Eastburn, has lived up on cliff side his whole life and he and his wife are well known in the area! They once ran a well known chartering fleet and did much for encouraging youngsters into sailing during the 70's and 80's.

Needless to say we got to our dinghy with a reasonably priced anchorage guide in hand. Signed of course!

Onwards to the Isle of Scilly and we had an easy passage, being flung around Lizard Point at 10 knots and arrived at around 5pm. We were a little nervous that Emmie's pregnancy might make her more susceptible to sea sickness but she just lapped up the passage like a trooper as she always does.

Hooked on the Scillies

We spent the next three and a half months in the Isles and didn't use a mooring once, exploring every possible anchorage there was, every trail to be walked, every cycle route



to be peddled, drank at every tea house and raided every vegetable honesty box to be enjoyed!

I'm going to try refrain from turning this article into a guide since, as it happens, David and I have since co-authored the second volume of his book, "Harbours and Anchorages of Scilly". With luck, by the time this article is published then it will be available on Amazon and I hope you find it useful and perhaps more visually appealing and comprehensive than the existing pilotage guides.

The first night was spent over on the north side of St Martins. We love it over there. There is no mobile phone reception, the holding is excellent and the pollock fishing is the best there is in the Isles. St Martin's also has the best range of honesty boxes containing locally grown veg which we took full advantage of. There is a great

ABOVE

We spent all of our time on the hook and didn't use a mooring once

BELOW LEFT

Emmie at the helm, now seven months pregnant

BELOW RIGHT

A stunning backdrop for dining

bakery, although you have to be there early and the Seven Stones Pubs is just excellent. Locally run, good honest food and great beer.

Great Bay is also frequented by Cornish working boats as it is accessible at all states of tide. Many of them are heading for Scotland on charters or mini expeditions but it's lovely to share and anchorage with them nonetheless.

As always, we had our folding bicycles on board and we actually left them in Hugh Town on St Mary's for the entire summer. It's really the only island worth cycling around and boy is it worth it! It's possible to cycle around the Island in about 45 minutes, which I did for fitness on a few occasions, but if you take your time and explore all the little nooks and crannies, you'll have days of exploring to enjoy. You can hire bicycles in Hugh Town and I really do recommend you do.





Over in the NE of St Mary's are some ancient graves which demonstrate that the islands were colonised from around 2500BC when Cornwall provided tin for the empires of ancient Greece and Rome, the Scillies were well known to the Phoenician traders who frequented our shores.

The islands were then much larger in extent than they are today; erosion and rising sea levels having taken their toll. In or about the year 400 AD, the main island, Ennor, became irrevocably flooded, and split into the smaller islands more or less as we know them today.

Just above the graves, hanging from a large tree is something equally impressive, or at least it was for us: The most amazing rope swing! I even managed to get both David and my father, both in their 80's, on the swing so there are no excuses. Extra points for climbing the tree and swinging from a stump around 6m off the ground.

Living on the kedge

Nearby is the very pleasant anchorage of Watermill Cove which gives excellent wind and swell protection from a south westerly.

Whilst we're on the topic of St Mary's, this is the only place you can reliably get water and fill your tanks directly from the quay. There are two berths with taps on the inside of the Quay, just before the dingy parking pontoons. They dry at low tide and most boats seem to the go alongside on a rising tide. If you study your tide tables you'll avoid

the crowds by going alongside on a falling tide. Gas and laundry is also available from a company called Sibley's (01720 422431).

We also spent a reasonable amount of time anchored in the Eastern Islands. Even when St Helen's pool and the moorings of New Grimsby are full, the Eastern Islands remain quiet and spacious. You can't land on many of the Islands but you can on West Porth of Great Ganilly and then walk over to the lovely beach of East Porth. The holding is excellent in firm sand and expect to be visited regularly by inquisitive seals from the colony over at Menawethan. The Eastern Isles can also make a good anchorage to arrive into the Scillies since it has a deep water channel from the south. Providing of course, you haven't sailed in on anything between an Easterly to a Southerly

ABOVE LEFT
Working boats, many enroute to charters in Scotland, seemed to favour Great Bay on St Martins

ABOVE RIGHT
Fortunately we'd packed our folding bikes

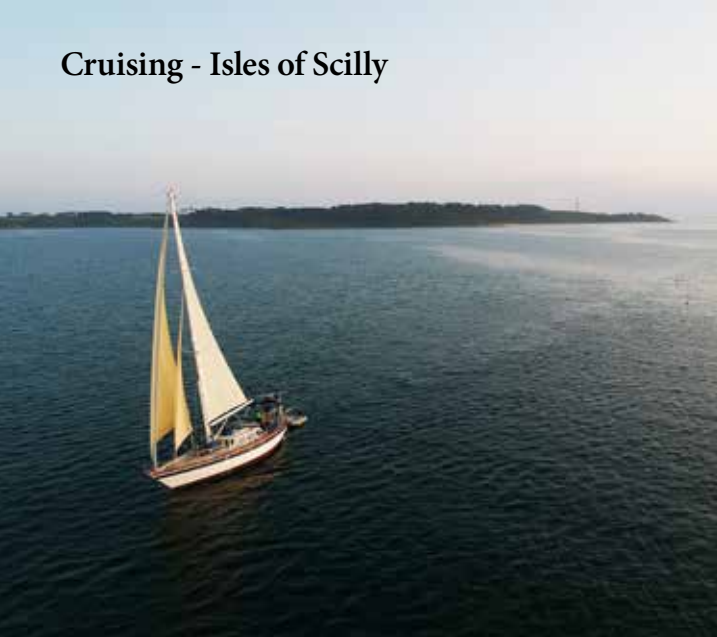
BELOW
Shadowfax anchored off St Martins

which makes it a little choppy.

Tresco is of course worth a visit. It is the only island that is privately managed. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the control of the islands was passed back the Duchy of Cornwall, but unwilling itself to invest in the islands, they granted a 99-year lease to the young philanthropist, Augustus John Smith. Apart from starting the botanical gardens it was his belief in education that lay at the heart of his reforms. Smith built schools on all five of the larger inhabited islands. Today Robert Dorrien-Smith who together with his wife, Lucy, runs the family estate as a business, including the truly excellent Abbey Gardens. 10 more points if you can find and explore Pipers Hole! (Hint: Take a head torch)

Bryher, also a favourite had a nice local feel to it. A few good eateries, honesty boxes, lovely walks and some great anchorages. Apart from New Grimsby Sound, Rushy Bay is spacious with good holding and, if your brave, you can sneak into Great Porth over on the West side. Shoal →





draft vessels can creep right up into the bay whilst deep draft vessels like us have to hang back slightly. There is only room for one or two boats but since no one ever seems to brave the anchorage, that won't be a problem!

On the topic of shoal draft boats, there is a great drying anchorage over at Samson Flats which, since the island is uninhabited, gives a real sense of seclusion when the tide is out and you have the entire island to yourself!

Samson was once inhabited but Augustus John Smith, mentioned above, evicted the island's population due to concern over their wellbeing and malnutrition, living mostly on limpets and potatoes. For all that Augustus gained many admirers in the Isles, after this he also gained many enemies!

A weather eye on the weather

I think I must mention the weather in the Isle of Scilly. Generally speaking you should be checking the weather daily, moving around

to different anchorages accordingly. This is part of the fun of the Isles of Scilly. However only one place stands out as an "all weather anchorage" and that is St Helen's Pool. It has gained popularity over the years and in bad weather you can see 30 boats or more gathered there. David Eastburn has ridden out many a gale in the pool even from the northwest, which from the chart might seem exposed. However, the Golden Brow reef acts as a natural breakwater, and at high water, in a gale from that direction the breaking seas just a hundred yards or so from the anchorage are spectacular. He has seen spray flying sixty feet into the air while lying in relatively calm water just a few hundred yards downwind.

All that said, there is a significant concern over St Helen's Pool which rears its ugly head when a storm passes directly over the Isles, causing a sharp wind shift. Unfortunately this happened twice in 2021 and on both occasions, yachts ended up on the rocks!

The Isles are right in the firing

ABOVE LEFT

Sailing away from St Mary's

ABOVE RIGHT

The anchorage of Great Porth on Bryher

BELOW

Two dramatic examples of not keeping an eye on the wind shifts as a weather system comes through

line for depressions coming from the South West. This is nothing new but the eye of these storms can easily pass directly over Scilly. The first we were present for and the second we sailed back to the safety of the Helford the day before.

In the eye of the storm

For the first storm it was due to initially blow from the SE at around 35kts, pass overhead at around 9pm and then come from the NW with increased ferocity. The problem with such wind shifts is that they're often very sudden after a dead calm as the eye passes overhead. This is all understood and I'm preaching to the converted for most readers of this article.

However, what many experienced yachtsmen don't appreciate in St Helen's is the kelp! I'll explain: The first storm was, as predicted, 30 - 35kts of wind from the SE followed by 35-45kts from the NW. We chose to avoid St Helen's pool for the above reason and sheltered from this storm in Great Bay of St Martins. We were →





one of three boats with masses of space and as such laid our anchor in sand with plenty of chain. At 9pm the eye passed overhead and all was still. We then moved, just before dark, to Little Bay, also to the north of St Martin's, to have more protection from the impending NW and to reset the anchor in the direction of the wind to come.

At 1am the wind came like a bombshell. Our instruments read 50kts + sustained for about 30 minutes and then dropping to 40kts. The boat next to us, who neglected to reset his anchor after the first part, dragged past us at a rate of knots. He barely managed to gain control, whilst naked at the helm and crew on the foredeck in pyjamas! 45 minutes later they were secure again.

However, over in St Helen's Pool, the picture wasn't so rosy. We heard calls on Ch.16 from a few different boats in trouble. In the morning, the reason we avoided the Pool was the main reason that so many had come unstuck.

When the wind shift came, it came instantly and ferociously. The GFS and ECMWF weather models, which most online forecasts use, are not high enough in resolution to show the wind wall that was to come. However but selecting the Arome model on Windy.com, having an accuracy of 1.5km, clearly showed the impending bombshell.

As the anchors of most boats were still set from the south easterly, they pulled out and tried to reset, as a good anchor should. The kelp however quickly clogs anchors in St Helen's Pool and many boats didn't reset. Not only that, the kelp is so

heavy, even the largest windlasses struggled to haul the mess aboard. Many tried to cut away the kelp without success and several boats were left motoring around in circles all night until daybreak in the dark.

One unfortunately couldn't retrieve their anchor due to the sheer weight of the kelp. We heard them calling on 16 for assistance in a very calm and seamanlike manner! I'm not so sure I would have been so calm! Fortunately, St Helen's pool even in these conditions was quite calm and they didn't take a pounding on the rocks. They refloated with assistance the following day.

The second storm was at the end of July, but we sailed back to the Helford River on a good forecast the day before. Emmie was now 7.5 months pregnant and we didn't want the stress of another storm. We weathered it in the Helford River and boy was it strong. A similar situation but this time it passed slightly north of the Isles.

The issue was the same however with a sharp wind shift. More boats ended on the rocks or aground in St Helen's Pool, Porth Cressa, St Mary's Harbour and New Grimsby. The coast guard helicopter was very busy even the lifeboat from Sennen Cove, Cornwall, was called out to assist! ✈



Tim Good made good on his chance encounter with David Eastburn to help update and revise Harbours and Anchorages of Scilly. The new second edition is available on Amazon from May 1st or from The Bourdeaux Shop in Hugh Town, Scilly.

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT
Crystal clear waters and rugged outcrops are what the Scillies are all about

Anchoring tips

Here are some points for this anchoring in the Isles when a storm is due pass overhead.

- Consider a double anchorage approach and move during the lull before the wind shift. It allows you to gain additional protection but also reset you anchor.
- If you do remain in the same anchorage, ensure you reset you anchor before the new wind direction comes and don't assume your anchor is good enough to reset itself with weed around. Lift it, drop it in the new direction, and reset it hard.
- Hoist an additional and bright deck light. Mastheads lights in a busy anchorage are useless. You want to be seen if other boats drag and are left navigating the anchorage at night.
- Choose an anchorage with firm sand and no weed if possible and get settled in a day or two before.
- Choose an anchorage with less boats, even if it is less well protected.
- 3 times depth is not good enough. Minimum 5 & use a good long nylon rope snubber.
- Remove your headsails! It's easy to do and it makes a HUGE difference!
- Check the more detailed weather models on Windy.com
- A twin anchor setup such as the Bahamian moor can be effective for wind shifts but is ill advised in a busy anchorage when others are swinging to one anchor.
- Some anchors reset better than others. There is plenty of data and tests on that subject but the Spade is one such anchor that is known to reset well.