An aerial photograph of a Scilly harbour. The water is a vibrant turquoise, with darker patches indicating rocks or reefs. A small, white boat is visible in the lower left. In the background, there are several green islands with some buildings and a small lighthouse. The sky is a clear, deep blue.

# HARBOURS & ANCHORAGES OF SCILLY

David Eastburn  
Tim Good

2nd Edition

# CONTENTS

David and Tim Write ...	1
Isles of Scilly	3
A Little History	6
Topography	11
Weather	13
Getting There	16
Arriving	19
 Overview of Anchorages	 23
St Mary's	25
St Agnes	43
Samson	49
Bryher	57
Tresco	65
St Helen's Pool & Tean	77
St Martin's	85
Eastern Isles	95
 Anchoring	 101
Transits	109
About the authors	113

# ISLES OF SCILLY

Lying just twenty-eight miles southwest of Lands End, the Isles of Scilly seem like another world. Beaches of white sand fringed with palm trees seem to have been transplanted from some tropical paradise. The beauty of these islands is breath-taking and, as you will see in these notes, for the yachtsman there are countless islands and anchorages to explore.

However, while in summer moving from one glorious anchorage to another may seem to be yachting heaven, the journey there from Falmouth, Penzance or Newlyn, although far shorter than the hundred-mile crossing to the French coast, is reckoned to be more challenging.

For one thing, once out in the Atlantic, yachts are exposed to the full force of the ocean; there are far fewer options for an alternative safe-haven once you have committed to the crossing.

Furthermore, there are few anchorages that can be deemed secure in all conditions, and often the safer spots are crowded with other yachts; this presents its own problems should there be a sudden change in wind direction.

While all supplies (food, water, fuel etc) are available in the islands, and limited repairs are possible, all these are more difficult to obtain and more expensive than on the mainland. None of this should deter the adventurous yachtsman from visiting this yachting paradise, but it is essential that he or she

should bear all of this in mind before setting sail from the mainland, and plan carefully. This planning should not only encompass normal passage planning, and a detailed examination of weather systems, but careful victualling, and servicing of all mechanical systems, electronics, rigging, sails etc.

A first-time visitor usually makes for St Mary's Harbour where there are stout mooring buoys for visitors and an array of simple shops and restaurants in Hugh Town. However, this position is exposed to the prevailing north-westerly winds and, even though it is well protected by outlying reefs and islands from the full force of the Atlantic swell, a nasty chop can develop in the harbour in anything from a force 4 or above from this direction, making life aboard uncomfortable.

With luck, you will remain there for long enough to enjoy a meal ashore and to explore some of the hidden gems of this lovely island, either by walking (the island is only three miles across) or hiring a bicycle. The information office behind Porth Cressa beach has all the information you need to make the most of your visit to St Mary's.

Soon, you will want to explore the other four inhabited islands: Treco, Bryher, St Martin's and St Agnes. While St Mary's is referred to by islanders as "the Mainland", these other islands are known as the "Off-Islands". Each has its own unique charm, but unless you have plenty of time, it will be difficult to explore them all properly on a first visit. Rest assured, that wherever you choose to drop your hook, you will be completely entranced by a peace and beauty that you will rarely find anywhere else.



# Samson Flats





# SCILLY WEATHER

In the summer months (May to August), the islands generally experience mild and temperate weather with temperatures averaging from about 10 degrees minimum to 20 degrees maximum. The driest month is June and the wettest August but, whichever month you choose, there is a likelihood of at least some precipitation during your visit.

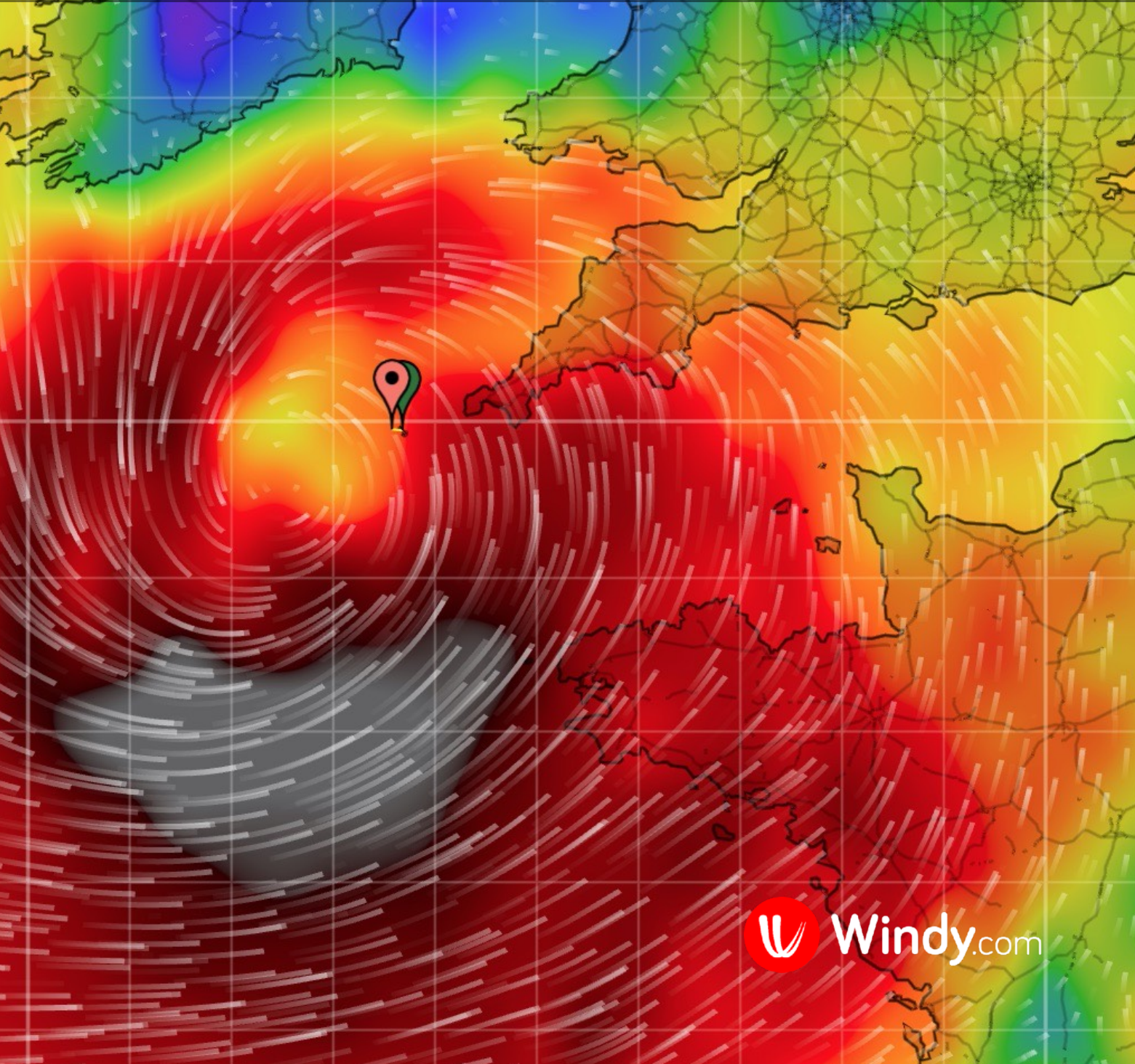
On average, there is about a 1% chance of a gale on any given day. Historically, in July and August, winds of Force 8 or above were extremely rare, but the two ferocious July storms of 2021, catching many unawares, put a number of boats on the rocks.

It must be said, that with the current climate emergency, there is a greater likelihood of more extreme weather in Scilly (as elsewhere) due to the displacement of the jet stream.

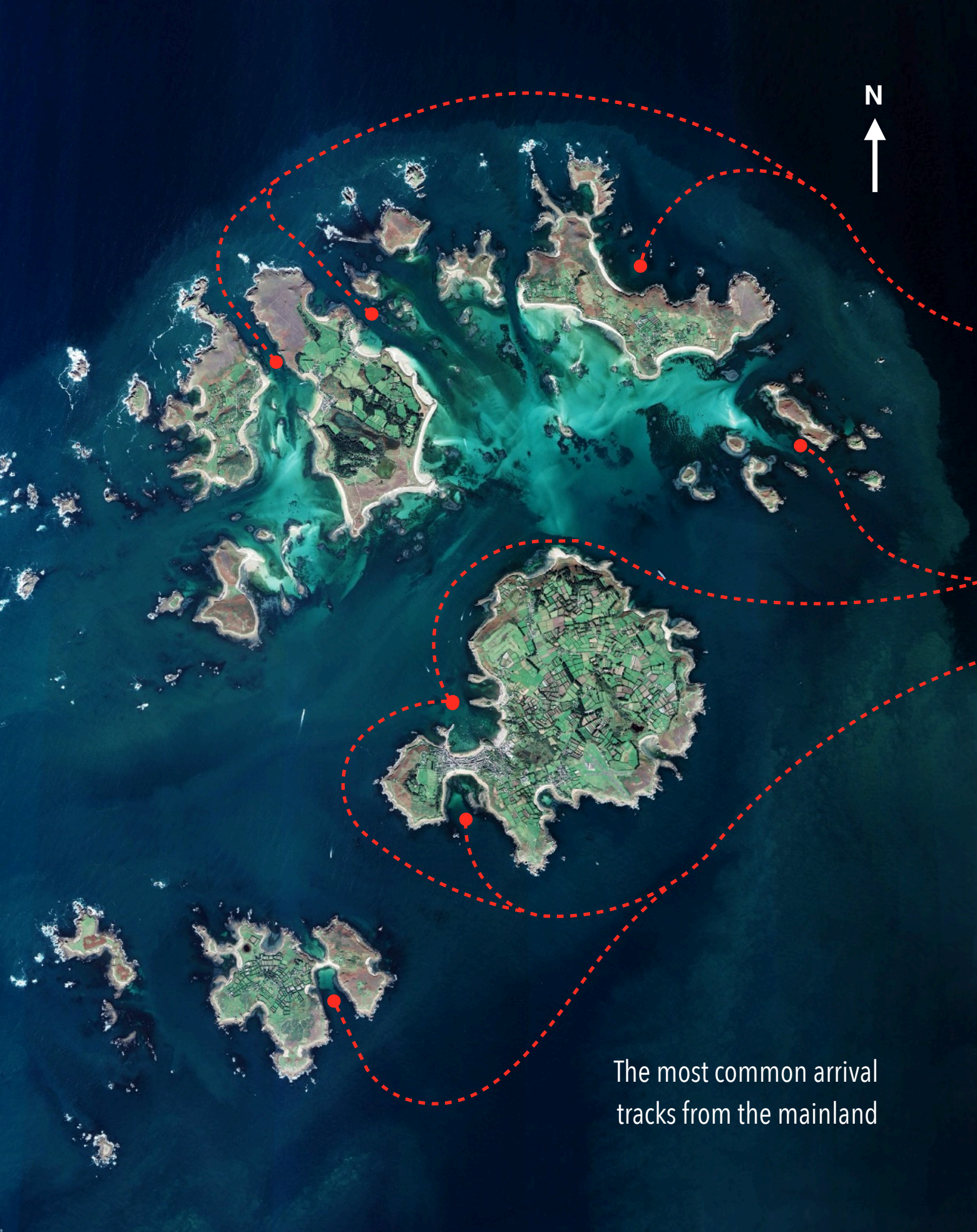
In May and June, winds from the south-east are rare, but there is a fairly even distribution of winds from the other points of the compass. In July and August, there are even fewer winds with an easterly component than in the early summer, and a corresponding increase in the number of winds blowing from SW to NW.

It should be noted that, in these later months, there is a significant preponderance of winds from the NW both in terms of frequency and wind strength. This is particularly noticeable in the afternoon; the result is often a breezy and lollopy anchorage in St Mary's harbour, where the moorings are fully exposed to winds from this direction. If the wind is strong, these moorings, while robust, are uncomfortable, and mooring lines to them may become subject to significant chafe.

There are many good anchorages in Scilly depending on the direction of the wind. Things become problematic when the eye of a depression causes strong winds to come from various directions. In that case, consider leaving in advance for a safe harbour on the mainland. The chart below is from July 3rd 2021 when boats in St Helens Pool, New Grimsby and St Martin's had major problems. A further storm of July 29th 2021 caused even more chaos.







N  
↑

The most common arrival  
tracks from the mainland



# ANCHORAGES OVERVIEW

We have included maps for each of the islands in each section of the book, but we thought it might also be useful to have a single map of the island chain as a quick reference. The letters mark the main islands whilst the icons roughly mark the anchorages. Each Island has its own section in this guide.

St Mary's		Pg. 25
St Agnes		Pg. 43
Samson		Pg. 49
Bryher		Pg. 57
Tresco		Pg. 65
St Helen's & Tean		Pg. 77
St Martin's		Pg. 85
Eastern Isles		Pg. 95
Large Anchorage		
Small Anchorage		
Drying / Shoal Anchorage		



# ST MARY'S

St Mary's, we feel, is rather under-rated by some visitors. Many sailors and tourists alike neglect the island in favour of the others; but it has plenty to offer. The island may be explored by foot or bicycle, discovering many remote beaches, honesty boxes for food, as well as art, and secret little gardens and nature reserves. These are well-covered in other guides if you wish to explore them for yourself, but we are here to focus on anchorages.

From the map on the opposite page, the numbers mark the main harbours and anchorages described in this book. Other anchorages we have enjoyed from time to time are marked with anchor symbols on the map. These may be very attractive to those who want to escape the crowds, but, partly to preserve their quiet charm, we have not provided much detailed information about them.

From the transit appendix (page 109) see 1 through 5.

St Mary's Harbour



Porth Cressa



Watermill Cove



Alternative Anchorages







1

3

2

Hugh Town

Old Town







*Shadowfax* anchored at the alternative anchorage of Porth Seal with Round Island Lighthouse in the background.



2

# INNISVOULS

Eastern Isles

This anchorage is rarely used and then only on the calmest days. There is a clear patch of sand with good holding, which could perhaps accommodate three or four boats, but, apart from locals, we have never seen anyone use this anchorage. Landing on either Great or Little Innisvouls is not possible but, if you like privacy, here is a place to be alone and undisturbed - apart from by the occasional visiting seal.

There are many dangers on entering this anchorage so study your chart, enter carefully and have a lookout on the bow if unsure. Avoid the neck between Great Ganilly and Great Innisvouls, or the one between Great and Little Innisvouls.



49°57.061N 6°14.966W



Tim has found the seals are particularly friendly around Menawethan, but they are wild so swim with them at your own risk and respect their space.





# TRANSITS

Long ago, David sailed to France or Scilly with only a compass and leadline as navigational aids. The Walker Log was a prized possession with its heavy brass rotator towed astern, and with an accuracy about as reliable as the estimated position plotted hourly on the chart. Then came Radio Direction Finding, Loran, Decca and now GPS.

There will be some who, reading this, will study the chart, make a passage plan and then use their phone as their primary navigation aid. There are others who scoff modern technology and insist on doing things as they have always done: plotting a position every hour, taking compass bearings on every conceivable lighthouse or church spire that may appear over the horizon, maybe even taking out their sextant to plot the meridian as the sun reaches its zenith.

Scilly requires a special kind of seamanship. The prudent yachtsman sailing to the islands will take trouble to learn skills from the past as well as today. Complicated tidal flows between the islands, sudden changes of wind direction and above all, the intricate necks between shoals, ledges and islands demand an exceptional degree of alertness and awareness from both skipper and helmsman.

Woe betide the helm who prefers studying his plotter to looking ahead to the transits which have kept local boatmen safe for centuries. Scillonians who seek to ply their trade among the islands, are still required to know all the transits included in this book plus many more. Here, without doubt, it is good seamanship to recognise that a transit is

still the most accurate means of steering a safe path through rocks and shoals, especially in the sudden cross tides, which are a feature of these islands. Unlike GPS, a position line based on topographical features will never, ever be off-line.

## Useful Transits:

<b>1. Pidney Brow (St Agnes) <math>\phi</math> The Hoe (Gugh)</b> <i>(clears the Gilstone when rounding St Mary's from the South)</i>	<b>241°(T)</b>
<b>2. N Carn of Mincarlo <math>\phi</math> SW edge of Great Minalto</b> <i>(clears The Woolpack when coming up St Mary's Sound)</i>	<b>307°(T)</b>
<b>3. White Transit Marks &amp; Lights on Mount Flagon (St Mary's)</b> <i>(lead into the harbour between two laterals from the west)</i>	<b>097°(T)</b>
<b>4. Buzza Mill (St. Mary's) <math>\phi</math> The Black Stripe on seafront toilets</b> <i>(leads into the harbour passing west of The Cow)</i>	<b>151°(T)</b>
<b>5. Buzza Mill <math>\phi</math> The end of the lifeboat slip</b> <i>(leads into the harbour passing between The Cow and The Calf)</i>	<b>163°(T)</b>
<b>6. Babs Carn (St Martin's) <math>\phi</math> Pednbean</b> <i>(leads west of Black Rock when entering Tean Sound)</i>	<b>154°(T)</b>



**7. Star Castle Hotel (St Mary's) ⚬ Gap Rock (St Helens)**

(leads into St Helens Pool from the north. On near approach alter course to starboard to pass midway between E Gap Rock and W Gap Rock)

**182°(T)**

**8. Crow Rock Bn ⚬ Telegraph Tower (St Mary's)**

*(leads into Old Grimsby Sound from the south - near HW only)*

**160°(T)**

**9. Hangman's Island (N Grimsby Sound) ⚬ Star Castle Hotel  
(St Mary's)**

*(leads into New Grimsby Sound from the north)*

**157°(T)**

**10. Castle Bryher ⚬ between the two summits of Great Smith  
(St Agnes)**

*(leads through Smith Sound)*

**351°(T)**

**11. The Gun Sight**

**St Helen's Carn ⚬ the cleft in Men-a-Vaur**

*(leads in to St. Helen's Pool from the south - half tide upwards only)*

**322°(T)**

## Other useful route descriptions with waypoints & transits:

**Tresco Channel** (across Tresco Flats)

<https://eoceanic.com/sailing/routes/56>

**St Mary's Pool** (Hugh Town Harbour) **via St Mary's Sound**

<https://eoceanic.com/sailing/routes/57>

**St Mary's Pool** (Hugh Town Harbour) **via Crow Sound**

<https://eoceanic.com/sailing/routes/58>

**North West Passage** (Deep water approach / departure to the west)

<https://eoceanic.com/sailing/routes/59>

**North West Passage** (Deep water approach / departure to the west)

<https://eoceanic.com/sailing/routes/60>

**Tesco Channel** (Deep water western approach)

<https://eoceanic.com/sailing/routes/61>

**Crow Sound to Tean Sound** (Over Crow Bar from the east)

<https://eoceanic.com/sailing/routes/62>

**Old Grimsby Sound from St Mary's Road** (Shortcut via Lizard Point)

<https://eoceanic.com/sailing/routes/63>



# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**David Eastburn** has sailed extensively on the south coast of Devon and Cornwall for over sixty years. Trips to Scilly are made every year, sometimes several times in a season, and in a variety of different yachts including catamarans, bilge-keelers, and deep draft vessels including his beloved *El Animado*, an Elan 43, in which he sailed for over twenty years to Spain, Ireland and to the Mediterranean. His knowledge of the islands is unrivalled (unless you are born and bred on Scilly).



Further afield, David's journeys have taken him across the Atlantic and into the Pacific Ocean, but most of his sailing has been done along the South Coast from Solent to Scilly and across the Channel to Brittany and the Channel Islands.

For much of this time, he has been partnered by his wife, Judith with whom he has been sailing since the mid-70s. In 1979, they raced to the Azores in a 30ft catamaran – the smallest boat in the fleet of 95 yachts that crossed the start line. Much to their surprise, they were the 10th yacht to arrive in Ponta Delgada. Together, with their children, they have sailed many tens of thousands of sea miles and gained an intimate knowledge, not only of Scilly and the south coast of England, but of

France from Cap de la Hague to Capbreton, and Ireland from Dun Laoghaire to Dingle. More recently, they have circumnavigated Ireland and enjoyed quieter times in their little retirement boat, *Moonshot* – a Twister 28 designed by Kim Holman.

For twenty years, Judith and David were chartering yachts out of Falmouth, running a sailing school and importing American yachts all in their spare time. As teachers with long holidays, they were able to run several flotillas each year across the Channel to North and South Brittany and even, on occasion, along the coast of northern Spain. Many hundreds of young people have developed a lifelong love of sailing through sailing offshore with David and Judith, and some have subsequently distinguished themselves as yachtsmen or yacht designers.

.....



**Tim Good** was brought up racing fixed-keel boats such as J24's and Squibs with his father in Bridlington, East Yorkshire. He is part of a maritime family going back to 1801 when his great (x3) grand father went to sea, aged 12 and each successive generation has been involved in the marine industry since.

Tim, now 42, only took to cruising in his early 30's but has been living aboard *Shadowfax* with his partner, Emmie van Biervliet, since 2016. By 2021, they had cruised over



25,000nm in Scotland, Norway, France, the Canary Islands and the Azores. They plan to circumnavigate over the coming ten years with their daughter Célestine. In fact much of Tim's contribution to this book was made during the summer of 2021 when they spent 4 months in Scilly whilst Emmie was pregnant, making use of the excellent service and experience of the Hugh Town midwife.

*Shadowfax* is a heavily built cutter rigged, Seastream 43, designed by Ian Anderson and built in Falmouth in 1996.

Emmie, an artist, continues her work whilst aboard and focuses mostly on buildings & architecture. Her work is exhibited internationally.

Tim owns a padlock manufacturing business which supplies the RNLI.

If you are interested, Tim & Emmie keep a blog of their adventures:

- [www.chasing-contours.com](http://www.chasing-contours.com)
- Instagram @chasingcontours
- [facebook.com/chasingcontours/](https://facebook.com/chasingcontours/)

**Hugh Town**, by Emmie van Biervliet ([www.emmievb.com](http://www.emmievb.com))

