

Baiona

Just before I was due to leave Cangas I received an email from Peter Orban to say he had abandoned his attempt to reach the Azores and was headed for Cangas. Peter had entered the Jester Challenge with his bilge keeled Kingfisher 22 Tisza' and had spent 29 days at sea fighting gales and constant headwinds but in the end after getting to within 330 miles of the Azores decided enough was enough. It was great to catch up with him and hear the stories from his trip. For those interested of the 24 sailors that started the Jester Challenge everyone has now arrived safely at their destination of choice. 10 reached the Azores and 14 retired.

On Thursday last week I left Cangas much to the disappointment of a small bird that had tried to make a home for itself under the cover of the self steering gear. We had a nice sail out of the Ria de Vigo towards Islas Cies. The wind was from the NW so decided to anchor off the Playa de S.Martin beach on the small southern island of San Martin. As the island is a bird sanctuary the pilot book mentioned that going ashore is forbidden but it was enjoyable sitting in the cockpit with a glass of wine doing some bird spotting!



Peter and 'Tisza'



new crewmate didn't last long



anchorage off Isla de San Martin



anchorage off Isla de San Martin



Islas Cies in background

The forecast for the following 24 hours showed some strong NE winds building in excess of 30 knots. The anchorages at Islas Cies have no protection from NE to SE so I made the call to spend the weekend in Baiona a few miles to the south and return to Cies next week when the winds calm and go back to N or NW. Baiona is renowned as being an attractive town and well worth a visit. It was the first European harbour to hear that Columbus had discovered America in 1493. It is also renowned for having expensive marinas so I am at anchor just outside which is a little bumpy but bearable. Yesterday I took a walk around the medieval fort on the northern headland of the harbour which gives a great panoramic view.



Another visitor to Baiona has been Chris and Kath on 'Harlekin' who I know from the Island. They set off from Island Harbour at the beginning of May and despite several technical issues on the way are in good spirits and planning to head south to Portugal in the next few days. They are anchored nearby and invited me aboard for dinner yesterday evening. I also spotted at the other side of the anchorage a Dutch single hander who I had last seen in Yarmouth Harbour in May. Small world.

I have really enjoyed chatting with the locals wherever I have been. Despite not speaking Spanish it is always possible to find someone that speaks english and everyone I have met has been incredibly friendly. The Spanish certainly like their late nights and most bars and pubs don't start getting busy until after 11pm and stay open until at least 3am. On Friday a quiet beer turned into a longer night than planned. I bumped into the crew of an english yacht called 'Kitiwake' who had just arrived after their Biscay crossing and several hours later I suddenly realised I had forgotten to put the anchor light on before going ashore. At this point though it was 04.30 and the sun was coming up so I figured it wasn't worth it!

Next week I hope to spend some days chilling at the Cies Islands and then I will temporarily go back to Cangas where a sailmaker will come and check my mainsail repair before I head on south to Portugal next month.

Cangas

For those wondering what I have been up to Fathom has been moored in Cangas since last Monday which is much longer than I originally intended. Firstly the weather last week was very unsettled so took shelter in the marina and enjoyed spending time in the town and watching some euro football games. Unfortunately I then picked up a sickness bug resulting in the last few days being a write off. Now starting to feel much better and hope to visit Isles Cies later this week which i'm looking forward to. This morning I had an email from Peter, another participant in the Jester Challenge, who after 29 days at sea has abandoned his attempt to get to the Azores. He plans to arrive in Cangas tomorrow so look forward to hearing his tales over a beer (yes I am confident my stomach can now handle one beer). Sorry for lack of updates recently more to come very soon!

Isla Ons & Ria de Pontevedra

I stayed a second night at Isla Toxa and on Monday walked across the small island and causeway and onto the big island to the fishing village of 'O Grove' to stretch my legs. I had decided to head to Combarro in the Ria de Pontevedra that afternoon but while checking my emails just before leaving saw the permit had come through allowing me to visit the national park island of Isla Ons. That island was enroute to the next ria and the weather was still good so decision was made. The pilot book suggested two possible anchorages the first off the main mole midway down the east coast and the second just off the beach 'Playa de Melide' about a mile to the north. I decided on the beach which the pilot book also described as 'being favoured by nudists'...

The nudists must have seen me coming or perhaps it was too early in the season. Either way the beach was deserted and I anchored close in. The dinghy was inflated and I rowed to the shore with a wine glass and half bottle of Rioja that needed finishing. I underestimated the amount of swell and nearly flipped the dinghy as I landed but despite half filling the dinghy with water and sand no harm done. Really amazing location as the sun set and I had my own private sandy beach with Fathom swinging at anchor in front of me. Definitely the highlight of the trip so far.



The next morning I went ashore and walked round the island which took the best part of three hours. Incredible scenery, flowers and wildlife. I didn't see another person until I got to the only village where I stopped for some lunch. The only trouble was I had left my phrase book on the boat and no one spoke two words of english. That was until a man came out from the kitchen and introduced himself as Winston from Ghana! Apparently he used to work on cargo ships and after arriving in Vigo eleven years ago jumped ship and has been working in the cafe on Isla Ons ever since. Winston had immaculate English so I had no problem ordering fresh crab which he told me had been caught that morning.

The anchorage had been a little roly due to the swell so I headed off to Ria Pontevedra on Wednesday afternoon. The wind was again very light only blowing 6 to 7 knots from the west but it was enough to sail so I unwound the yankee (foresail) and Fathom made her way into the Ria at a sedate 3.5 knots. Too lazy to take the sailcover off and hoist the main but what's the rush?! I made the decision to anchor off the beach 'Playa de Silgar' which is between the village of Porto Novo and Sanxenxo on the north shore of Ria de Pontevedra. This area of Galicia is a major tourist attraction for the Spanish and the beach was rammed.

Thursday I made my way to Combarro at the end of the Ria and anchored off the small marina. The old fishing village is very picturesque especially the old quarter with its narrow alleyways and sea houses. There are about thirty Horreos (raised granaries) still existing from the 18th and 19th centuries

which were used to store food. Certainly interesting place to visit.



Playa de Melide



anchorage off Isla Ons



anchorage off Isla Ons



looking at Isla Onza from Isla Ons



Isla Ons



a gull surveys his kingdom, Isla Ons



Combarro



Combarro

After best part of a week at sedate anchorages and quiet villages I was in need of some civilisation so have spent the last couple of days at Sanxenxo where there are many bars and quite a bit going on. It also gives me a chance to catch the England football game this evening and do some laundry and fill up the water tanks. The marina is ridiculously expensive so I will leave tomorrow. Current plan is to spend about a month in Ria de Vigo and Baiona and visit the national park Island of Islas Cies when there is some settled weather. The forecast is a bit more unsettled for this coming week.

[Ria de Arousa & Santiago de Compostela](#)

The next destination after Ria de Muros was Ria de Arousa which at 8 nautical miles wide and 15 nautical miles long is the largest of the Galician rias and apparently one of the most interesting. As the weather was so settled I decided on taking the shorter route into the ria though the narrow Canal de Sagres and weave my way through the rocks and shallows. No dramas and decided on anchoring for the night in a pretty bay to the north west of Isla Arousa. It was so nice in fact that I had the first swim of the trip.

I'd read a lot about Santiago de Compostela and how a trip to the old city and one of the greatest shrines of Christianity couldn't be missed when in this area of Spain. So on Friday morning I motored over to the marina at Vilagarcia and caught the train to the city. 8 Euro for a return trip and it only took 20 minutes each way. Since the discovery of the tomb of Saint James at the beginning of the 9th century, the city has been the focus of thousands

of pilgrims. On entering the hugely impressive cathedral I joined a queue which I assumed was to get into the centre of the building. We slowly shuffled through a doorway and up some stairs. It was only then that I realised I was in a queue of pilgrims who were passing through the ornate baldachin and taking turns to hug the statue of Saint James the great behind the altar. We were in such a narrow space that I couldn't pass by or go back and not being religious I was feeling increasingly uncomfortable as I got closer. When it was my turn the best I could do was give him a quick nod of respect and dart off. I'm sure I heard a couple of murmurings from behind. Anyway the cathedral is a magnificent building (see photos) and the old town built of local granite with its narrow alleyways is definitely worth seeing and i'm glad I made the trip.



first swim of the trip



Cathedral at Santiago de
Compostela



Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela



anchorage east of Isla Toxa



anchorage east of Isla Toxa



anchorage east of Isla Toxa

I was keen to go back to anchor and on Saturday morning motored over to A Pobra do Caramiñal and put the hook down off the beach. I had been reading up on the best anchorages in the ria and one in particular, to the east of Isla Toxa, stood out. The pilot book described it as 'a chance to stray off the beaten track, however the approach has numerous shallows, rocks and fields of viveros and the area is prone to silting'. In view of the calm settled weather I decided to give it a go and early afternoon on Sunday approached the shallows on a rising tide just to be safe. A few interesting moments when the water depth suddenly went from 15m to 2m but Fathom weaved her way past the shallows and we made it to the anchorage. Slight drama yesterday afternoon when I realised I had run out of bread. There are no shops around these parts so I resorted to baking a loaf onboard which turned out surprisingly well. The only trouble is i've eaten it already.

Decided to go ashore and stretch my legs yesterday evening so pumped up the dinghy and fired up the outboard for the first time since last August. The Island of Toxa is very well groomed and contains a golf course, couple of hotels and a health retreat. As I walked around I couldn't help feeling it was all very artificial and aimed at the smart set. Got chatting to a couple and their daughter from the only other boat in the anchorage who set off from France a few weeks ago in their large catamaran and are aiming to arrive in Greece in September. Their widescreen TV is so large that after it got dark yesterday I could see that they were watching an episode of Game of Thrones.

As I type this Fathom is surrounded by a flotilla of small workboats who have anchored with divers down searching for shell fish on the seabed. I am waiting for a permit to come through giving me permission to visit Isla Ons and Islas Cies which are protected national parks. The weather has been extremely settled for the last week with the wind never rising above 5 knots from the SW. I hope this continues for another week so I can visit the national parks which have exposed anchorages. After Isla Ons I intend to enter Ria de Pontevedra and visit Combarro and the historic town of Horreos which come highly recommended.

[Laxe, Camariñas and on to Ria de Muros](#)

Towards the end of last week I was trying to decide whether it was time to exchange the busy city of A Coruña for some dramatic scenery and quiet anchorages. I woke on Saturday morning to the sound of heavy rain pelting down on the cabin top so didn't rush. The forecast was for a brighter afternoon but with the potential for headwinds towards evening. I made the decision to head 35 miles west to the small fishing village and port of Laxe. After departing Coruña just before noon we flew along (for Fathom that is) at 5 knots for a couple of hours and I took the opportunity to rig the trolling line and try and catch some late lunch. By mid afternoon the sky's had darkened again and one particularly menacing cloud delivered a squall of 25 knots and torrential rain forcing a couple of reefs and reduced headsail. The south east wind then veered to the south west forcing a change of course away from the coast. Another yacht crossed our path and clearly had a similar destination and we tacked back and forth in close proximity for several hours. The anchor went down just off a great looking sandy beach at 21.30, a whole 15 minutes ahead of the other boat (i'm clearly not fully into cruising mode yet). As I was flaking the main sail onto the boom I grabbed a handful of sail only for an 8 inch tear to appear down the leech (see photo). Very surprising and slightly worrying as I had the sail checked over before leaving the U.K.

Sunday was spent stitching the tear back together and patching it. As the weather was showery and the sail needed to be dry for the patch I took the sail off and brought it into the cabin which was a right palava when single-handed as all the reefing lines had to be untied and the sail slid out from the groove on the boom. The repair took most of the day and by early evening the sail was back in position and packed away. The repair should be a good temporary fix and I will get a sailmaker to check it over when I get to Vigo/Baiona. Laxe looked very pretty but I didn't have the motivation to pump the dinghy up and go ashore. The church bells seemed to ring most the afternoon in conjunction with near continuous rockets being fired into the air producing huge bangs. I couldn't work out if this was because a fishing boat was approaching with full catch or if it was the norm for a Sunday. Sunday also marked two weeks since the start of the Jester Azores Challenge

in Plymouth. Seems an age ago.

Fathom had been the only boat in the anchorage Sunday night so decided to leave Laxe on Monday morning and head 23 miles south west to Ria de Camariñas. The wind was very light so forced to do a fair amount of motoring. I put the fishing line out again only to notice after an hour the line had gone limp. After pulling it in there was no lure on the end. Either I had caught a big mumma who bit through the line or my knot came undone. I think the later is more likely. After entering the Ria at 15.00 decided on mooring at Camariñas over Muxia. Went ashore for a shower and couple of beers. Camariñas is a very attractive harbour and took advantage of the local supermarket to stock up on some fresh grub.

Yesterday was by far the best day of sailing since leaving the U.K. The sun was shining and the wind was from behind meaning a run and then broad reach down the rugged coast to Ria de Muros. It piped up to 24 knots for a short time and whilst surfing down a wave I noted a speed over the ground of 7.6 knots very briefly which must be a record for Fathom. This coastline and in particular Cabo Finisterre have a rather fearsome reputation but the sail along the coast past Cabo Toriñana, the most western point of mainland Europe, was great. If the wind had been from the west a lot of sea room would have been needed but as the wind was from the NE we set a course fairly close in. Despite changing lure still no luck catching fish...

Entered Ria de Muros just after 17.00 and was greeted by a pod of dolphins who dived around Fathom for a good 20 minutes. They are very entertaining to watch. Muros itself is a fantastic little fishing village and i've decided to stay here a couple of nights. 8 or 9 visiting boats are in town including some Irish who sailed non stop from Cork.

A huge congratulations to Julien on 'Bula' who was the first to arrive in the Azores couple of days ago. Amazing effort and from what I have read from email updates he is on cloud 9. Another two have arrived in the last 24 hours so well done all!



tear in the main sail



flying south with Cabo Finisterre just in shot
ahead



Cabo Finisterre



this chap was having better luck catching
fish than I was



welcome party entering the Ria de Muros



Camariñas with Fathom moored left of picture