

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.

[Birthday arrival in Spain](#)

I must have upset the wind gods because instead of veering to give me a nice beam reach into Spain as forecast the wind stayed hard on the nose for the last 36 hours. The theme of the last 7 days. After crossing the shipping lanes on Friday afternoon the wind increased to 25 knots again from the SW preventing me from setting course for shore. So I hove to for the night and got some sleep whilst minimising ground lost to the east. In the morning the wind was still blowing hard preventing me from getting west enough to reach La Coruna but after consulting the almanac decided to go for Ria de Cedeira 30 miles to the east which was described as having a good sheltered anchorage and approachable in all weathers.

Beating into incessantly strong headwinds was getting fairly tiresome by this point and I was counting down the hours until landfall. Eventually at 19.00 yesterday I motored in to Ria de Cedeira and dropped anchor in the driving rain and wind. The glass of birthday whiskey tasted oh so good.

Today was spent drying gear and sorting and tidying the boat and the sun even decided to come out and say hello. Tomorrow I'll head along the coast to La Coruna where I can have a decent shower (its been a week since my last!).

On reflection it is disappointing I didn't make the Azores however in view of the worsening weather and oncoming low pressure system I definitely made the right call to divert. So far I know of 11 retirements out of the 22 starters in the Jester challenge several of whom had technical issues due to the conditions encountered and the rest in view of the forecast. I can't help be concerned for those who set off with no way of contacting land and no way of checking the weather. Hope to hear good news soon. I ended up completing a crossing of Biscay single handed which was unplanned a week ago and did it without a suitable weather window so I feel chuffed with that. Fathom and I came through some pretty touch conditions well and I have so much confidence in her ability to look after me. What a boat she is. I'm now really excited about the prospect of cruising south and exploring interesting places on the Spanish and Portuguese coasts. An opportunity I wouldn't have had if I had reached the Azores.



0.1 knots of wind on the first morning out. It didn't last



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sailing close to another Jester boat 3 days
from Plymouth



big seas



at anchor in Ria de Cedeira

Days 3 – 5 Lumpy Bumpy

Quite a few of us were close together as we cleared the shipping lanes off

Uscant on Tuesday morning. The wind remained light and I managed to catch up on some sleep. Others were not so fortunate and spent the night dodging fishing boats. It was then all change later on Tuesday and overnight into Wednesday as the seas built and the wind hit 30 knots. I have not sailed in waves as big but with three reefs in the main and the staysail set Fathom took it all in her stride and we managed to creep to windward at a couple of knots. Others with lighter and smaller boats were forced to heave to until conditions improved. It was difficult doing any kind of task in the cabin but I managed to heat some soup at least.

Conditions were not much better through Wednesday morning and I had only managed to take 30 minutes sleep overnight. I received several VHF calls from another Jester boat to say he had electrical problems and had enough and was turning around and heading for Falmouth. I then found out another jester boat had received an unfavourable forecast for a few days ahead and decided to retire also. I have now learnt at least two others have also retired. After receiving the long term weather grib file via satellite phone yesterday I can see that there is an active Atlantic depression forming and heading from the Azores right into Biscay early next week. Not a normal path for this time of year and right through our route. I thought about turning round but have made the decision to plug on south and pull into a Spanish port to let the storm pass. The jester rules say stops are allowed.

As I type this we are flying south hard on the wind 200 miles north of La Courna. Nearly three days hard on the wind in 20 knots of breeze means cooking is suffering and I resorted to a boil in the bag yesterday. There will be some more headwinds tomorrow so hope to arrive in Spain by end of Sunday all being well. Once there I can catch my breath and wait for the weather to settle down before getting back in the game.

I knew with the highs would come the lows. It is a disappointing that I can't make a crack for the Azores in one go but I have made the safest and most sensible decision and there is no way I want to get caught in that Atlantic depression. Looking forward to some following winds one day soon!!

[Days 1 & 2 – settling in to life at sea](#)

I'm settling in well and life is relaxed onboard Fathom. I have just about finished my birthday cake a week early. I tried my best to hold off for a few more days but couldn't resist. Looking forward to getting stuck in to Heather's fruit and brandy cake afterwards.

Conditions have been light since the start on Sunday with full sail up just about all the time. Only had the need to put a reef in once and this was shaken out after a couple of hours. Yesterday morning the anemometer was

reading 0.1 knots for around 20 mins. Requires a lot of patience to keep the boat moving in the light stuff. The fleet appears to be in two main bunches the first heading out west past the Scilly's and the second bunch a more southerly route towards Ushant. I chose to make use of the NW breeze and head more south. Those of us within range have been chatting on the vhf which has been good.

Several seem to have been unlucky with fishing boats at night and have not had much sleep. Roy on 'Spirit of Venus' hurt his neck and has decided to pull into Penzance to get it seen to. 15 to 20 minute cat naps are keeping me fairly refreshed and hopefully once I am further offshore I'll be able to sleep for a little longer with less traffic around. The AIS and radar watchman alarms give me warning when any shipping gets close but it has taken some time to put my faith in these and relax enough to sleep for a few minutes with the boat sailing herself. I've decided to make the most of a south west breeze to get some westing in today. Conditions are due to liven up this evening with around 25 knots and I'll probably tack then and head south. Spag boll on the menu for dinner (with parmesan of course).

[almost time for the Jester Azores Challenge](#)

After leaving Yarmouth on Monday I am now in Plymouth and in 48 hours time 23 of us will be sailing off towards the Azores a voyage of 1400 nautical miles as the crow flies.

I have entered the Jester Azores Challenge which is open to single-handed sailors in boats under 30 feet. This is my first Jester event and it has been great to meet up with the many characters in the Jester family. The challenge runs every two years and alternates between the Azores and across the Atlantic to Newport, Rhode Island. A shorter event was run last summer to Baltimore in Ireland. The idea was formed 10 years ago in the spirit of the legendary Blondie Haslar and the original OSTAR race (Original Single Handed Trans-Atlantic Race). In 1960 Blondie raced his junk rigged folkboat across the Atlantic and proved small boats can be just as seaworthy and safe as much larger ones. These days OSTAR have banned boats under 30 feet from entering deeming the risk too high.



the Jester Village



guess who will get to the Azores first?



waterline, what waterline?

The Jester Challenge exists as a low profile, non-commercial event for like minded sailors with a sense of adventure. There is a huge amount of camaraderie between the entrants and the emphasis is on self sufficiency and seamanship rather than being first across the line. There are in fact no rules, no regulations, no entry fees, no inspections. The only guidelines are:-

- *must be single-handed – no crew

- *boats under 30 feet

- *human power is the only acceptable alternative source of propulsion other than the wind

- *stops are allowed

- *there is no time limit

- *the challenge starts off the Western end of Plymouth breakwater at noon on Sunday 15th May

- *the challenge finishes at Praia de Vitoria, Terceira, the Azores.

My aim is to update the website occasionally when at sea via text posts (no pics) and twitter updates and my position will be updated onto the tracker map automatically every 12 hours or so. Here's hoping for following winds and a few fish on the line.