



The Magazine

Autumn 2011

A Bavaria Breton Winter
- tips on over-wintering

*The devil's breath of
the Gibraltar-Morocco rally*



A Bavaria Breton winter

No, not a season with a Franco-Teutonic identity crisis, but an account of Andy and Anne's experience over-wintering their Bavaria 36 in La Roche-Bernard on the Vilaine River in Brittany, northern France

We had narrowed our choice of winter berth down to either Vannes or La Roche-Bernard. Whilst in Vannes on *Pipit*, we hired a car to reconnoitre La Roche-Bernard. We both knew it would be the right choice as soon as we caught a glimpse of the leafy shores of the River Vilaine as we approached the marina. The beautiful setting with the promise of scenic walks, sunny autumn day dinghy trips on the river, a pretty and interesting town with a year round market, supermarket, and large DIY store - in addition to a range of other small shops – all convinced us to book our winter berth that day. Vannes is a lovely, interesting and historic city to visit, but we thought La Roche-Bernard's more peaceful and rural location would better suit us for the winter and the two really are as different as chalk and fromage.

So, at the beginning of October we motored up the Vilaine towards Arzal. We lost sight of the sea, then left salt water behind as we transitted the lock to motor the remaining five miles up to La Roche-Bernard, a mixture of emotions and thoughts tumbling through our minds. We felt strange and a bit sad to be leaving the sea behind, melancholic to be at the end of our first season as full-time

liveaboards, but excited to be settling *Pipit* into a safe winter berth and ourselves into a different phase of liveaboard life.

Harvesting mushrooms, chestnuts and sloes

For the first two months, we were blessed with surprisingly warm autumnal weather and enjoyed river and woodland walks and dinghy trips on the river. We spotted local flora and fauna including red squirrels, kingfishers, herons, buzzards, and colourful mushrooms, and foraged for chestnuts and sloes.

Through the YBW forum, we met two other liveaboards (well, three including their lovely Springer spaniel) who were over-wintering at Arzal. Tim and Karen became great friends and we had many fun times together through the winter and spring. As they had brought their car out for the winter, we had the chance to join them on several excursions further afield, mostly days out to the bigger supermarket, DIY shops or chandlers... us liveaboards really know how to live! Lots of laughs and helpful advice reminded us how great the boating community is.

We knew living aboard in Brittany was bound to be wet and cold at times but we kept snug and warm aboard using two electric oil radiators, occasionally firing up the diesel heating for extra warmth. So warmth wasn't a problem but the dehumidifier, though extremely effective, couldn't prevent condensation collecting on the inside of the hull behind settees and under bunks. Regular inspection and mopping was necessary as well as ventilating these spaces. There was nothing we could do to

prevent condensation forming on the single-piece aluminium hatch frames. They are directly connected to the outside and so got very cold.

We also warmed our cockles with hearty boat-made soups (Jerusalem artichoke and Spicy parsnip being two recurring favourites) or tasty wine-enriched casseroles (we think it's illegal in France not to put wine in them). The latter, cooked in the slow cooker, not only saved on gas but filled the boat with warming winter aromas.



Over-wintering a Bavaria - *à la française!*



The art of foot

Our biggest crisis came at the end of November when, due to the extreme cold, the marina (perhaps not surprisingly) switched off the water supply. We were surprised though when they said they might not switch it on again until March - cue a bit of a panic! Yachtie camaraderie and another YBW forumite to the rescue (thanks Dave and Iris), and to cut a long story short, we managed to rent a lovely little house in the town.

*« A full-size oven?
Think Christmas turkey! »*

After a week or so, the freeze relented and the marina said they would switch the water off only during periods of extreme cold. The allure of the piping hot shower, brand new kitchen (with full size oven – think Christmas turkey!) and roaring log fire was such that with Andy's Mum due to visit and Christmas approaching, we decided to 'treat' ourselves and stayed on at the house until just after Christmas, even though the water was back on at the marina the week before.

Staying in one place over the winter also reminded us that much as we enjoy sailing and the challenge of passage planning to unfamiliar destinations and exploring new places, familiarity can be enjoyable in a different kind of way. Knowing just where the such and such is in the supermarket, which shop sells the best baguettes, which café serves the best coffee, how the washing machines work (Andy still hasn't mastered this one) can be surprisingly satisfying! Other than the afore-mentioned icy freezes and some snow, not having to worry too

much about the weather for the next passage or how it would affect *Pipit's* security was also a relief.

The winter passed remarkably quickly and it didn't seem long before the spring arrived and it was time to have *Pipit* lifted out at Arzal. With the return of spring also came the return of many of the Brits who keep their boats at La Roche-Bernard. We'd met many of them 'virtually' via emails, having been introduced by Dave and Iris and kept an eye on their boats during the winter. It was great to finally meet many of them, and needless to say we shared a sundowner or two!

Familiarity has its own attractions

We spent two weeks on the hard at Arzal, servicing *Pipit's* engine, polishing the topsides, antifouling and generally getting her ready for our next season of sailing. After going back into the water, we spent another couple of weeks anchored off Arzal and La Roche-Bernard finishing other maintenance tasks. This gave us a whole new experience of the Vilaine River as we were treated to spectacles of traditional boats sailing past during a regatta, stunning sunrises and sunsets, plus myriad wildlife including kites, herons, coypu, kingfishers and leaping fish.

Leaving the Vilaine behind was another day of mixed emotions - sad to be leaving our perfect winter billet, but back to the open sea, the last of Brittany to explore, the Vendee, the Charente and then...gulp, across Biscay to Spain...

Andy & Ann

Pipit, B36