



Leaving Plymouth for a new lifestyle.

“eventually the day came when we retired from full time work”

TRADING PAGES

Foregoing the chattels of a life ashore can lead to a new pace of life. **Andy MacKellar** and **Ann Rowe**, who sold up and sailed away in April 2010, take us through their first season as liveaboards.

“Do you think we could do this all the time?” was the simple question I posed to Ann as we relaxed under the bimini of our chartered yacht in Kalamos, G&Ts in hand. Ann’s affirmative answer was to set us on a course that would change our lives and take 18 months of planning and preparation.

We already knew a number of liveboard sailors, so were aware that the lifestyle has its challenges as well as its compensations. We also knew that modern communications and the internet now make this lifestyle choice simpler than ever before to manage.

The process of moving aboard a yacht permanently is complex at the best of times, but we lived 200 miles apart (Cornwall



and the Cotswolds), our yacht was roughly halfway between in Plymouth, so the logistics were even more daunting. We each spent weekdays in our separate worlds, working through the day, doing myriad other chores in the evenings,

thereby leaving weekends free for being together, either sailing or enjoying the Cotswolds or Cornwall. Even prior to the decision to become liveaboards, this resulted in a fairly hectic life, so adding the management of boat upgrades, selling two houses, completing renovations on another for letting, selling three cars and shutting down shoreside lives required careful planning. Fortunately we are both quite organised souls and, as we made list after list, decisions were made and items crossed off. At times, though, it seemed we were adding more items to the list than we were crossing off. We even found ourselves doing jobs not on the list, but we did gain some satisfaction from then adding them to

10 WINTER LIVEBOARD TIPS

- Try to **secure a berth** in or near a village or town that doesn’t ‘shut down’ for the winter. In places where there may not be a liveboard community this will reduce your sense of isolation and allow you to enjoy local events in the community. There are usually good deals available in marinas for six month winter contracts.



- **Slow cooker** – create some great meals using the ‘free’ marina electricity rather than burning gas (this also helps reduce condensation). You will also be rewarded with appetising aromas when returning from a brisk winter

walk with dinner already cooked – all you have to do is open the wine.

- **Electric kettle** – saves gas again.
- **Electric, oil-filled radiators** provide ‘free’ dry heat and save diesel.

- In colder climates, a **dehumidifier** is essential – in Brittany ours was removing up to two litres of water per day.

- **Ventilate** the whole boat, lift mattresses and cushions and open lockers regularly to allow air to circulate.

- **Mop up condensation** – even with a dehumidifier and ventilation, there will be lots of condensation ‘behind the scenes’ in winter. An ultra-absorbent synthetic chamois is ideal for this.

- **Get a Kindle** – great for the long dark winter evenings and saves lots of bookshelf space.

- Believe it or not **chandlery** in the UK seems relatively cheap – bribe friends and family to load up their boots when they visit.

- With heating on, there should be **no need to winterise** your engine, but running it periodically is a good idea. You’ll also be able to have occasional day sails without having to re-commission the engine.



the list and immediately crossing them off.

Our 2003 Bavaria 36, *Pipit*, had an excellent specification when we bought her. We did, however, decide on several upgrades which we thought would make our liveboard lives safer, more comfortable and self-sufficient. These included a stern arch with solar panel and wind generator, and a chartplotter at the helm.

Eventually, the day came at the end of March 2010 when we retired from full-time work. This gave us a just a month to pack up two homes, move aboard full-time, make final arrangements for administration and correspondence that couldn’t be handled electronically and prepare for our imminent departure.

Having spent a hectic month ploughing up and down the M5 and A30 between the Cotswolds, Cornwall and Plymouth (and piling an alarming amount of ‘stuff’ onto *Pipit*), we achieved our target and handed over the last house keys on 27 April 2010.

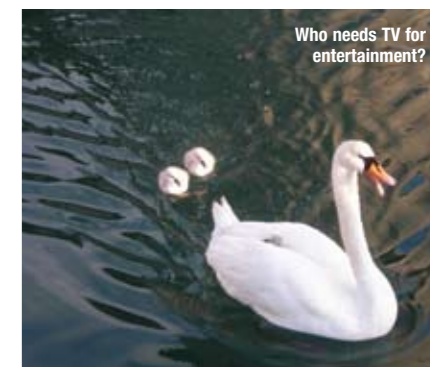
Day one aboard didn’t start well – suffice to say a hacksaw and impact driver had to be deployed when trying to remove stainless steel bolts from the alloy mainsheet traveller. This had to be removed in order to fit the new liferaft to the hatch garage. Not the relaxed liveboard lifestyle we’d been planning!

AND THEY'RE OFF!

Three weeks later, after fitting new traveller parts received from Sweden and fitting the new liferaft, we finally set sail from Plymouth towards Falmouth. We wanted to



Tranquil evening at Dittisham.



Who needs TV for entertainment?



Cherbourg - our first foreign landfall.

OVER-WINTERING CHOICE

We didn't want to rush past the delights of Brittany on our way to the Mediterranean, even though this would mean over-wintering in a relatively cold climate. While 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, large DIY store in addition to a range of other small shops convinced us to book our winter berth that day. Vannes (our other final contender for over-wintering) is an attractive, 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.



Alderney: a calm evening in Braye Harbour.

Portland: Chesil Beach.



Cooking with local produce in St Vaast.

Paimpol.



spend some time in familiar waters to test all our new equipment before crossing the Channel. This also gave us the opportunity to explore the delights of the Helford, Fal, and Dart rivers more fully than we'd ever had time to do when weekend sailing.

After a few wonderfully relaxing weeks cruising the West Country, we found ourselves on a buoy at Dittisham facing our biggest sailing challenge together so far: Lyme Bay and Portland Bill. OK, not exactly Cape Horn, but a significant passage for us, as it is for many coastal sailors. In the event, we had a straightforward passage across the Bay, albeit motorsailing most of the way to round the Bill at our planned time and continuing onwards to the impressive new Portland Marina. It was the longest passage we had sailed together and took us to the first place that we hadn't been to before – it would be all new destinations from now on.

There was certainly no question, even at this early stage, in either of our minds that we had made the right choice in our new lifestyle – it would never be all G&Ts and olives, but we already loved it.

NEW LANDFALLS, NEW CHALLENGES

We spent a week in Portland, walking the coastal path, spending time on the spectacular Chesil Beach and waiting for strong winds to abate. A short passage then took us to Poole, where we spent another week enjoying the warm weather, Brownsea Island (even spotting a red

squirrel) and Poole Quay. Tackling our next 'big' challenge of crossing the Channel, we left Poole Quay at 0500 on 23 June, coincidentally Ann's birthday. We were treated to a beautiful sunrise, and then contrary to the forecast of ideal westerly F3-4 winds, found none for the entire crossing and so had an uneventful passage, having to motor all the way on a completely flat sea with warm sunshine and perfect visibility. Even the shipping lanes seemed relatively empty and we didn't have to alter course at all, so although frustrating not to have sailed, our first Channel crossing could have been a lot worse. We arrived in Cherbourg in glorious weather and in good time to wander ashore and celebrate both our first foreign landfall and Ann's birthday at a truly delightful courtyard restaurant.

We spent the following three months cruising the ports of Normandy, the Channel Islands and North and South Brittany, which are deservedly familiar favourites with so many British sailors. These months were full of exciting sights and tastes, linguistic learning curves, a mixture of weather and, taking the plethora of rocks and the huge tidal streams and ranges into account, lots of testing pilotage and passage planning, which we enjoyed. An additional challenge was that of securing to pontoons that are not only very short and shy of cleats, but would also give our Olympic divers great springboard training. We took each new sailing milestone in our stride, planning each carefully following advice in pilot guides and from other sailors



Downwind sailing with reefed genoa only.

UPGRADES AND ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

Although already well specified, we added the following equipment to Pipit:

- Storm-Bag storm jib
- Hypo Hoist MOB recovery sling
- Raymarine C70 chart plotter at the helm
- AIS
- Active-X radar target enhancer
- D400 wind generator
- Solara 85W solar panel
- 350w pure sine wave inverter
- Two additional winches on the aft winch pads
- Nestaway sectional pram dinghy
- LEDs for anchor light and cabin lights
- Stainless steel custom fabricated stern arch to house solar and wind generators, aerials etc.
- Replacement stackpack, sprayhood and pedestal plus new bimini



Trebeurden: Timing is everything when negotiating sills like this.



First frost in Brittany.



Iconic architecture of Treguier.



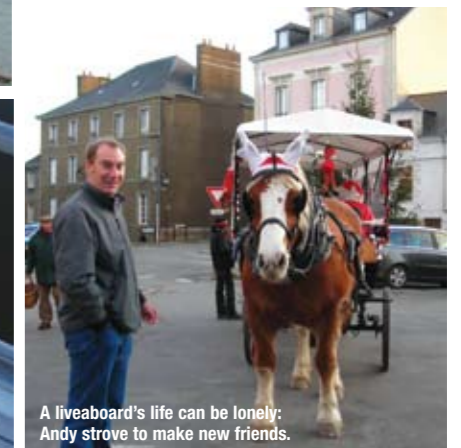
Idyllic conditions en route to Perros-Guirec.



Autumnal flora and fauna in woodland along the Vilaine River.



Frosty on deck but snug below.



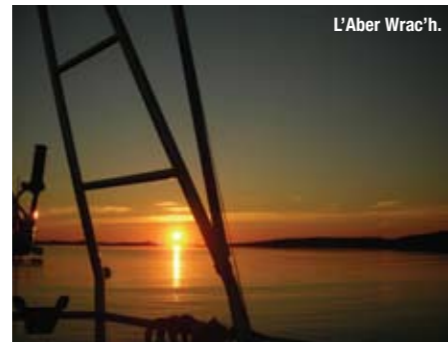
A liveboard's life can be lonely; Andy strove to make new friends.

and successfully transited the often feared Alderney Race, Chenal du Four and Raz de Sein, and sometimes opted for some of the 'inshore' shortcuts, all of which built our confidence significantly.

BAVARIAN WINTER... IN BRITTANY

By the end of August, our thoughts had turned to over-wintering locations. After much investigation and numerous emails, we had decided on La Roche-Bernard on the Vilaine River.

After spending the end of our first season cruising Quiberon Bay and the Morbihan, 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 negotiated the lock to motor the remaining 5 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



L'Aber Wrac'h.

be at the end of our first season as full-time liveboards, but excited to be settling *Pipit* into a safe winter berth and ourselves into a different phase of liveboard life.

For the first two months, we were blessed with surprisingly warm autumnal weather when we enjoyed riverside 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



Chestnut festival at La Roche-Bernard.



Acting the goat

chestnuts and sloes.

We met two (three including their lovely springer spaniel) other liveboards 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 supermarkets, DIY shops or chandlers – we liveboards

really know how to live it up – as well as some sightseeing. 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. Indeed, 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, because they are conductively connected to the outside and therefore 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 into them), the latter cooked in the slow cooker, not only saving on gas, but filling the boat with the mouthwatering aromas of rustic food.

SNOW JOKE...

Our biggest crisis came at the end of November when, due to the extreme cold and snow, the marina 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 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. After a week or so, the freeze relented and the marina said in future they would switch the water off only during periods of extreme cold. The allure of the piping hot shower, brand



Safe and secure in our winter berth in La Roche Bernard.

new kitchen (with full size oven – think Christmas turkey!) and roaring log fire was such that with my mother 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.

The only other minor difficulties we faced through the winter, aside from the snow and ice, were two types of debris of an organic nature – logs and branches of varying sizes drifting downriver, which we removed whenever we could reach them, and deposits on the pontoons from the ducks living on the river who usually slept on the pontoons at night. The almost daily chore of clearing the latter away and the fact that there were fewer ducks around by the spring was totally unrelated to the many delicious meals of duck we enjoyed – I can assure you that the supermarkets often had them on special offer.

Staying in one place over the winter also reminded us that, much as we enjoy sailing, 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 items are in the supermarket, which shop sells the best baguettes, which café serves the best coffee and how the washing machines work (Ann says I still haven't mastered this one) can be surprisingly satisfying. Other than the aforementioned 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 we were happy to keep an eye on their boats for them over the winter and periodically report back. It was great to finally meet many of them and we enjoyed convivial company.

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 – we were sad to be leaving our perfect winter billet, but glad to be heading back to the open sea with the last of Brittany to explore – Vendee, Charante – and then (gulp), across the Bay of Biscay to Spain. ■



Extreme hardship aboard.

ABOUT US

Andy and Ann met in 2007 through a mutual interest in sailing. They chartered a number of times in Plymouth and the Ionian and then bought *Pipit* in November 2007 for weekend sailing.

An escape plan was hatched to become full-time liveaboards and sail at a leisurely pace to the Mediterranean, where they intend to spend a number of years cruising. Andy worked for over 20 years as a Freelance IT Consultant in various engineering industries.

He began sailing in 2003. Ann, via Canada, California, Australia and then Cornwall had a career in financial and business administration, and has owned and sailed traditional wooden boats for over 20 years.

You can follow Andy and Ann's adventures online by going to www.yachtpipit.com