

A first Channel crossing –final part

Adding up the East and West going tides for the crossing at an anticipated speed 5.5 knots gives a net tidal offset of 3 miles West and the tide will be about to turn Eastgoing at the anticipated arrival time. Aiming a few miles off to the West gives a course of 182 and allowing a bit for leeway the desired course to steer is 190. Unfortunately, the best course obtainable by the helmsman is 170. That is clearly the making tack for now so the helmsman is instructed to keep as close to the wind as possible whilst keeping the speed in the region of 6 knots and keeping an eye on the course being achieved.

Every hour the log is made up with the log reading and average course steered. This is plotted on the chart as an EP. [GPS man would log and plot GPS position on the chart but would hopefully at least glance at the distance sailed and the tide to see if that position 'looked right'.]

Various vessels are spotted. A ship going West in the inshore traffic zone probably following a line from South of St Catherine's to South of Portland Bill. A series of bearings increasing show it to be passing well ahead. Two other vessels are seen but even through the binoculars they look like a confusion of white lights. Probably fishing boats but some way off so just keep an eye on them. The final light is a single one that at first appears dead ahead. Binoculars show it to be green so probably sailing on a port tack so the give way vessel. Careful watching shows it to be on the starboard bow and it is indeed the tricolour of a yacht probably looking to catch the last of the tide at the Needles channel. "Green to green or red to red perfect safety go ahead" is the rhyme and the yacht eventually passes about 100m to starboard.

Watch changeover after three hours and continue sailing on the making tack plotting EPs or GPS positions as before. A nice opportunity for a traditional position fix presents itself. The excellent visibility allows a bearing and rising and dipping distance on St Catherine's light. Start the plot again from that new confirmed position. Also note that log seems to be under-reading a bit. The two crew on that watch are 'unwell'. Fortunately one of them feels much better on the helm and the other is OK as leeward lookout looking forward under the genny. Eventually they admit that they chose to wash down their lunch in the pub with a couple of pints each.

The Westgoing shipping lane is clearly visible with several ships in view. Not a separation zone so normal rules apply, Bearings show three of them going clearly ahead though the fourth requires careful watching, Change in its aspect shows it to have altered course to pass astern.

Watch changeover and one of the 'invalids' does not want to go below. He is well wrapped up and it's a warm night so should be OK.

Very little of note on the Eastgoing lane at first but something a little odd appears. Two vessels with the second appearing to be a large mass of lights. Binoculars show the first to be a tug with a tow of more than 100m and the second would almost certainly be some sort of rig. Time to make some West anyway so tack now and keep well clear. Log the tack and plot [or GPS]. After about an hour the helmsman reports that the best course that can be achieved is veering more and now has some North. A plot and a recalculation of the tides shows that Cherbourg should be possible after a tack so tack it is. Still best course to windward at first but as wind continues to veer, free off a bit and steer a calculated course to a point a little West of Cherbourg to give a little in hand if arrival is after tide has turned.

Nothing further of worry on Eastgoing lane and wind decreasing so shake out the reef.

15 miles from Cherbourg recalculate tides again and plot new course. [GPS man would probably follow a course to a waypoint in the Western entrance from here]. Daylight now of course so no lights to help the traditional navigator who is looking out for signs of land which eventually appear on the starboard bow. It seems an age before anything identifiable appears but eventually what must be a chimney of the nuclear reprocessing plant is visible. Using that to amend the EP refines the position and a course to the Western entrance is shaped, More land appears but without identifiable marks and it's surprisingly difficult to see anything that looks like Cherbourg. A clearing line based on depth allows safe progress while things resolve. At last the radio mast to the East of Cherbourg appears above the haze and after sailing a bit further provides a course through the Western entrance. This is used by ferries amongst many other large vessels including cruise ships so care required.

The wind pretty much dies in the Grande Rade so the sails are dropped and the motor fired up. After a careful look for big ship movements in the Petite Rade motoring is continued to Chantereyne where a berth on the visitors pontoon is spotted and grabbed. A stroll to the Capitainerie allows opportunity for a well-deserved shower as well as paying for the mooring for the night. And the bar upstairs is serving tasty snacks to go with the even more well deserved beer.