



The last part of our Atlantic Crossing West to East Oostende (B) to Groningen (NL)



Travel letter 5-2020



As of November 14, we have been moored at our wintering marina "Oosterhaven" in the city of Groningen in the northern part of the Netherlands. So, the last part of our journey full of challenges, has been accomplished finally. However, the narrative of this last part of our Atlantic Crossing from Oostende to Groningen is still missing from our Travel Letters. To make our long journey across the Atlantic Ocean complete, read our journey following underneath.

From Belgium to the Netherlands

Despite the total lock-down due to Corona in Belgium, we had a great time in Oostende for 2 weeks. The next part, from Oostende to IJmuiden had to be a piece of cake, Or not?

At least, we would travel along familiar territory even though it was a long time ago. The route is plotted in OpenCPN and Navionics on the tablet and the coordinates added into the GPS. The old but still useful paper charts are within easy reach on the chart table. We are looking forward to this trip to IJmuiden.



- We have considered several harbours south of IJmuiden as a port of entry in the Netherlands, but most of them were more as 10Nm off the intended course line (that distance had to be sailed back the next day of course). In view of the short weather-windows approaching, we did not think this was desirable.

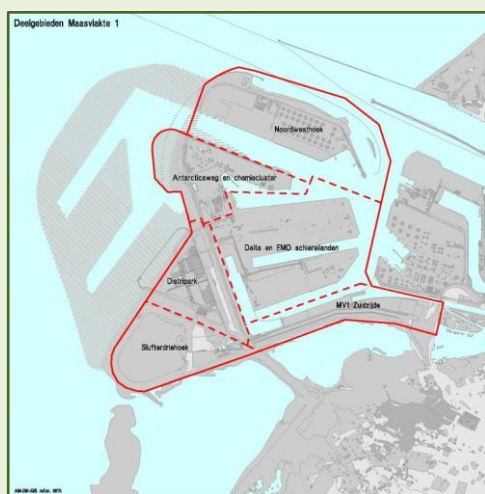
Waiting patiently for a longer weather window was rewarded. On November 4, 10 o'clock in the morning we could finally cast off the lines. Nobody helped us or waved us off because the marina was quiet, no occupied boats because of the lock-down. Even the harbour master was on a week's leave.

With a little sunshine and a light breeze from the east, we motored out of the marina passing the main breakwaters. No major shipping at the harbour entrance so the course to IJmuiden can be picked up immediately.

It was a beautiful autumn day to be on the water. Not a lot of wind, but with Mr. Perkins and the headsail our progress was reasonable and as the tidal current ran with us it helped a lot. To be able to tune in to the right VHF channels in the different shipping areas we crossed, we used the (very ancient) paper charts next to the digital asset.



After reporting by VHF at the Control Centre Maasmond (CCM), we were given permission to continue our journey. They could follow us very well with the AIS and with the VHF on the specified channel we could listen in and follow any instructions. Occasionally we heard ships asking Maasmond whether everything was going well with that "jachie" (Dutch dialect for small yacht), they referred to us, of course. Once we were called by VHF by Maasmond to explain a situation. A large and fast sailing outgoing vessel that according to our AIS would pass awfully close to us. They informed us that as soon as that ship passed the breakwaters, their course was shifted to the north leaving us plenty of room. We were simply allowed to maintain our current course. Still, it is nice if you are well informed by the CCM, even though you are only a "jachie". Once again it appears that the purchase of our AIS, years ago, was a hit. We would not want to miss it anymore.



Note:

- Nevertheless, we had some doubts about the passage of the Maasmond because on our paper charts of 2001 we were much further out than we are now experiencing based on the buoys and the distance to shore. The coin dropped a bit delayed because it was only later that we realised that the new "Second Maasvlakte" was not yet on our paper charts of 2001. We became more enthusiastic again of our possession of the digital charts. These are constantly being updated online. On the drawing the area circled in red is the "First Maasvlakte" and the grey area to the left, the "Second Maasvlakte".

After passing Maasmond we could both take turns to sleep for a couple of hours. The nightly hours were cold but luckily dry. At the first glimpse of dawn, we sailed into the spacious outer harbour of IJmuiden. No traffic so we drove directly to Sea Port Marina without any problems. Right at the end (or beginning) of a completely empty jetty M, at 6 o'clock on 5 November after 102Nm we tied Zeezwaluw next to an electricity box. Once we are safely moored, we plug our electricity cable into that beautiful box. But did not yield electricity, not a single spark! Shit because it was freezing cold (5°C), outside and inside Zeezwaluw! Tried 2 other facility boxes with the same result so we stopped. Quickly we had only one icy cold drink (we did not have the special drink Dutch Berenburg yet) in the cockpit in full foul weather gear before we plunged into our bunk to get warm. That worked out fine and we slept for a couple of hours.

IJmuiden and dear friends visiting Zeezwaluw

Seaport Marina IJmuiden is our first Dutch marina in 18 years. When we wake up at 10 o'clock in an incredibly quiet marina, our nose is almost frozen, that is how cold it got inside. The thermometer tells us that outside it is "only" 8°C, inside it is not much warmer, so it's cold for us wimps. Quickly we put on the warm clothes and by VHF we call the harbour master. Fortunately, we get an immediate answer. After explaining that the 220V connection of 3 boxes do not work they promise to come by immediately. Within 15 minutes we have shore power, the main fuse was blown. Our electric heater is running at full speed to get the main cabin back to our comfort level for the next 2 hours. In the meantime, we enjoy a red-hot cup of coffee.



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Later that morning, while sitting in the sun looking around us, the sky is a bit supernatural because of the fog or haze in which the harbour seems to be caught. There are few boats left due to low season in November and the many empty moorings complete the story as you can see in the picture.



Afterwards we stretch our legs and walk to the harbour office to pay the harbour fees for 2 nights. It is a long walk over a (again) heavily fouled (sea gulls droppings) jetty.

To get to the entrance we must cover the largest imaginable distance there is in the harbour. We may get closer in as the friendly lady in the office offered but we decide to stay "Corona-proof" for those 2 days. There appears to be free Wi-Fi that works faster than our French SIM, so fine. Electricity and water are included in the price. This is acceptable because the low season daily price is €50,- for our ship!

Quickly our friends Hans & Ati and Joyce & Bert are informed that we have finally arrived in IJmuiden and where we are moored. The rest of the day we spend on cleaning up the boat, airing sailing clothes etc. Zeezwaluw of course needs to be ready for inspection for old friends will visiting us. In Oostende we have stocked up on fresh stuff, so we do not have to walk to the supermarket 3km away. On Friday Hans comes to visit us with his son and at our request he brings fresh special Dutch brown bread with him. Also important is that Hans brings the ANWB Almanak part 2 with him. This book is necessary for lock and bridge opening hours from Delfzijl to Groningen.



Friday around noon Hans calls that he and his son Robert are at the entrance. We walk to them along the jetty. Unfortunately, "hugging and cuddling" is out of the question which feels uncomfortable when you have not seen each other for 5 years. But the reunion feels immediately familiar, as if we had spoken to each other a week before. Pleasantly chatting the walk to Zeezwaluw is quick. Coffee while sitting in the sunshine in the cockpit, of course with 1,5m distance. Hans' bag turns out to have many more surprises besides our requested items. A pile of reading material and delicious drinks that we accept with many thanks. Not much later, after opening a bottle of the surprises, we have not a plain coffee but an Irish Coffee without whipped cream! It is very pleasant and time flies. Ati stayed at home this time but next time she comes along she lets us know in a phone call.

As we had only paid for 2 nights and wanted to stay another 2, we quickly walked to the harbour office to do so. Unfortunately, no one is present at the weekend. On the electricity box next to the boat is an explanation that you can also pay the harbour fees via the Blue Water App. We had never done that before, so we are going to try something new. We downloaded the App and according to the explanation we had paid for 2 more nights. Through the email we received the confirmation that we had paid. This kind of innovations is great for us as sailors.

On Saturday Joyce and Bert come to visit us. Because we must make a toast at our arrival in the Netherlands!



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(So have our own Gin and Tonic jetty just like years ago in our home port Stad aan't Haringvliet)!
Sitting in the sunshine in the cockpit this time as well, we catch up. The beautiful amarelle bulb
that Joyce



brought with her already has quite a lot of stem and should get red or pink flowers all by itself, without us having to water her. Time will tell if we have taken good care of her. (It gave us 3 pink flowers, where after it collapsed very quickly)

It is lovely to see each other in person after 5 years. The toast to our safe arrival is done with a cup of coffee, accompanied by a special filled shot-glass of Peter Café Sport from Horta. The beautiful glass is filled with real Dutch Berenburg from the Widow Joustra which brought J & B as a present. Awesome!

Also, the visit of Joyce and Bert flies by again.

But from now on we can meet each other more often soon, especially when the Corona restrictions belong to the past and free travelling is possible again.

Another hop further

Once we downloaded the weather forecast on Sunday morning, it turns out that from Monday 9 November onwards there will be a nice and spacious weather-window. We want to sail to the Navy Marina in Den Helder to visit Ineke' cousin in their new apartment and have a "Bami or Nasi meal" (a typical Navy meal) in the Navy restaurant above the harbour office. However, the plans change again. If we would stop in Den Helder and stay 2 days because of the planned activities, the beautiful weather window would be over by the time we would like to leave. It is going to be very windy again along the Dutch coast.

If we sail to Delfzijl in one go, we have all the time we need to get there within calm weather window. It will be sailing through the night in 5° Celsius maybe a shower too, but we decide to go for it. The promised visit to the family is cancelled. They understand that we want to continue as it is possible now. The water tank is topped-up and the boat is prepared to leave IJmuiden Monday morning.

- Inside route from Lauwersoog via the Reitdiep to Groningen is not possible for 2 shallows patches based on our information. If we had planned this route, it would no longer be possible. Christa, the harbour master(ess) of the Oosterhaven we are on our way to, e-mailed us that one of the bridges in the city of Groningen is out of use.

At 7 o'clock the next morning we are at the fuel station and top off the diesel tank. It is a self-service machine, and we pay with a credit card. At 8 o'clock we sail out of the harbour breakwaters on the engine (like the last period usually) and the high aspect headsail northwards. It is a beautiful day with clear skies and sunshine. It feels much warmer than the 15°C indicated by the thermometer and we enjoy this beautiful autumn day at sea. Our prepared hot meal tastes great in the sun in the cockpit.

Famous rows of dunes slide by while the Hond's Bossche Seawall near Petten is also recognised. Not long after, we sail past the Schulpengat the entrance to Den Helder at a nice speed. Den Helder must wait.





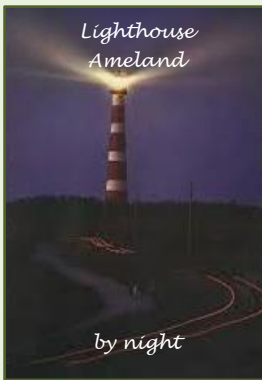
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We must sail all the way along the islands chain north of the Netherlands which can be tricky due to strong currents.



Luckily, above Texel, we have the strong tidal current with us, that's good news! We see the lighthouses of Texel and Terschelling in daylight, but we only recognise the next ones by their light character (each lighthouse blinks in its own frequency).

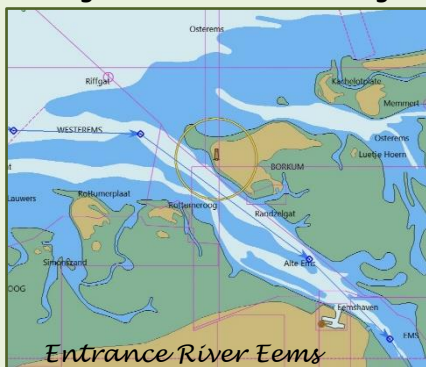


Our watch system starts early, and we enjoy it very much to have every other hour of sleep in our warm bunk. Outside it is only 6 degrees Celsius in the meantime. Above the island Ameland the current has turned, and we do not like it. Also, the wind has turned more to the eastern quadrant therefore we have wind and current against us, so we do not make much progress anymore. There are also a lot of fishermen around us, but they have AIS too. We can clearly see course and speed. Occasionally we change course as not to get too close to the fishing vessels. It seems as if all fishing vessels are all coming out after dark because it is getting busier and busier around us.

It does not matter that we do not sail fast because we prefer to arrive at the right time during the day at the Eems safe water buoy to make optimum use of the current. At 4 o'clock at night when Ineke wakes up, Riens reports that a thick fog makes the world small. We see less than 10m ahead! That is stressing. We decide we both stay in the cockpit. Fortunately, we have Navionics digital charts on the tablet in the cockpit and see exactly where we are. On the AIS we can see where the fishermen are and what their course is and that is perfect in this grey soup.

It was already cold but now it is even colder due to the fog while everything is dripping wet from the humidity, us included. The wind is now completely against us at 10-14kn and the headsail is being rolled in. Due to the counter current and wind waves we bounce, and it is not a pleasure.

The engine must be set to a higher RPMs to move forward. Both of us hope the fog will lift when the wind is increasing in the morning and the sun rises (was predicted). This turned out to be a vain hope! All day long the dense fog persists, and we do not see a thing!



We had set our route via the Eems all the way to the port of Delfzijl in the GPS and on the digital maps. Riens had set our route just on the outside of the buoyed channel so we were out of the way of major shipping. That was a good thing because we could not see anything. On the charts we could see where the route was going, but only when the buoys were 10-25m away did we see them but just for a moment.

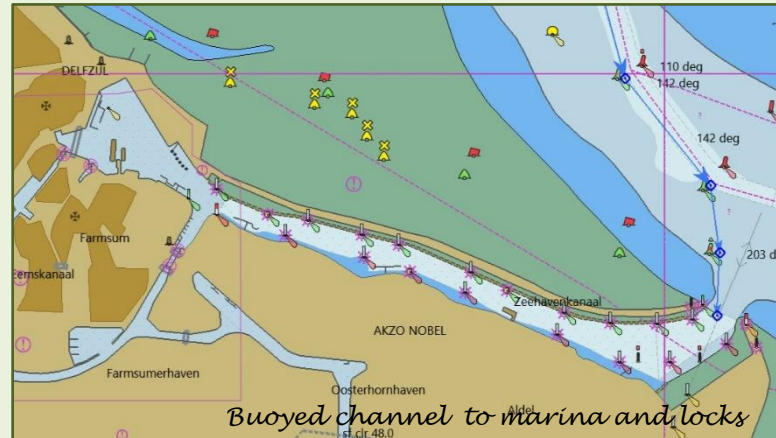


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In the meantime, we no longer had to complain about the speed, because completely according to plan, the rising water had swirled in the right direction as we passed the buoys. We regularly had to change course because 2 large dredgers were working out and inside of the buoys. What a miracle of technology the AIS is then. We even had to sail past the harbour breakwaters of Delfzijl via the digital chart because the breakwaters were not visible either and the leading lights were out of order.

Even on the canal in the direction of the locks and marina, the fog was extremely heavy. In a snail's pace we arrived at the entrance of the marina. Here too the marina was empty except for a few ships and we had to pick our own spot out of the empty ones.



Discovering Delfzijl

We were so happy that we had safely arrived in the marina for we were both utterly exhausted. This time we were also moored close to an electricity box, but it was pad locked. Okay, we would walk to the harbour office, but that was impossible. Part of the jetty towards shore was cordoned off with red-and-white ribbon because of missing planks. So, we had to move to the other side of the cordoned off area. Within half an hour we had moved and were secure all over again. The moment we stepped ashore to find the harbour master; he was already standing next to us! It turned out there was power available despite the padlock on the box. We



Delfzijl city centre & marina

could put the plug in the closed cupboard in a special way to reach the socket, the harbour master told us.

Fine, now we had power and could turn the electric heater on to dry the boat a bit. Everything, even inside, had become clammy and damp. We paid 2 nights in advance at the harbour master (who gave us a discount) on the jetty, wrote down the Wi-Fi code and we were happy

again. The rest of the facilities were out of business because the season was over. In harsh weather conditions we arrived safely in Delfzijl. The next part via the Eemskanaal to Groningen was no longer dependent on the weather. That felt good.

That night we slept like a log! Well rested and ready to explore Delfzijl, the world around us turned out to be just as small as the day before. Dense fog. Changed plans and made it a cosy day "at home".



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Another sailor informed us that the Driebondsbrug, the last bridge in the Eemskanaal before Groningen, might not be opening. We e-mailed harbourmaster Christa if she knows if the bridge is/will be repaired. In the afternoon we received an e-mail with adjusted opening hours for the Driebondsbrug.

Only on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 12 a.m. the bridge will be operated. The first possibility for us to continue is Saturday 14 November. Nothing lost we will explore Delfzijl in the meantime as we do not know it.

Explore and do jobs again

We enjoyed Delfzijl for 3 days as soon as the fog lifted. The city centre is a 5-minute walk from the marina. In the picturesque old centre, there are many shops that are worth a visit.

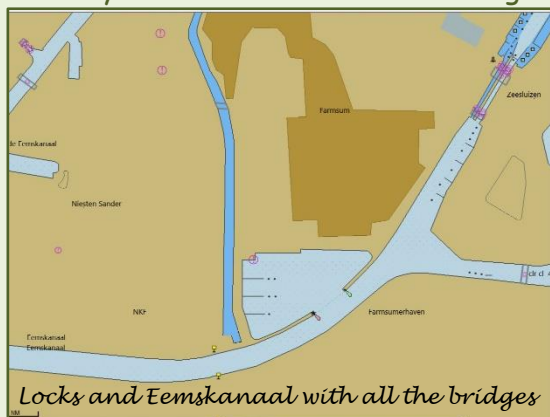
But the yummiest shop is visited first, the REX take-away cafeteria where we get French fries with mayonnaise and a croquette and fricadel (Dutch specialties) What a feast we had!



We checked the navigation lights because we must leave Saturday at 7am and at that time it's still dark.

Along the way we have always used our 3-colour top light while we now need the navigation lights. Turns out the red light is not working or getting to work. Also, the steam light does not want to listen to the boss, but we can use a rechargeable LED light for 2 hours as a backup. Then again, we spend the whole Friday solving the problem. Eventually we had to pull a new electricity cable from the socket in the front below deck to the red light. That took some effort but, in the end, we succeeded, we are visible in the dark again.

The very last nautical miles to Groningen



At 7am departing from a dark marina in light fog. 30 minutes later we are waiting in front of the sea lock for an opening. After calling by VHF, we can sail quickly into the lock.

Yes, it has been a while since we "did a lock". It is the small lock which is 5m wide where we enter. We are the only ship and can neatly moor a bollard further than intended. Not much later we enter the Eemskanaal.

The canal with farmhouses next to it and their familiar smells evokes memories long gone and when the fog subsides a bit, we even spot a buzzard on a pole. A not so spectacular trip, but we do enjoy the rural surroundings behind the canal dyke.

In the foggy morning we sail through 6 bridges that are operated immediately after VHF calls.





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At 5 minutes before 10 am we are at the Driebondsbrug. When we just wanted to moor to report us, we are told over the VHF that we will get an opening any minute. This bridge operates smoothly. Only 2 city bridges left before we reach the Oosterhaven. Christa had already told us what our berth would be entry B box 18.



Zeezwaluw moored in Oosterhaven marina

Because we wanted moored with our bow to the east (winter blizzards are coming from the east), the back of Zeezwaluw had to be turned into the slip first.

The manoeuvring space is not abundant, but Riens neatly parks Zeezwaluw in her spot. On the jetty is Carola (a Facebook friend of Sailing World Woman) already to take our lines. Such a nice welcome. After an hour we are moored and tied the way we like so we can plug into the shore power. We are in a fixed mooring for at least 6

months. Lovely, finally we are there. Clean up the mess inside a bit and relax.



Map of Europa, within the circle the location of The Netherlands

To the right a zoomed-in map of the Netherlands with the city of Groningen in the yellow top to the right

The above picture is only to visualise where we are for whom are not so familiar with Europe etc. (as we are not with US for example)

Voices and shouting our names outside make us stick our heads out of the hatch and there are standing Ineke's niece Thally and her husband Joop. They come to welcome us to Groningen and deliver a delicious "Grönninger kouke" (a special delicacy of Groningen). Awesome!





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At the same day, a year before on 14 November 2019 we started our Atlantic Crossing from West to East in Curacao. A long journey with challenges due to Corona and a strange year in terms of weather conditions. Luckily, we have done it nicely.

For the first time in 18 years we are back with Zeezwaluw in the Netherlands and "at home" in Groningen, in the northern part. Groningen the city where our lives together started in the early 1970sh.

Riens and Ineke Elswijk at SY Zeezwaluw

