

*A patient sailor always has good weather*

For five weeks, the Zeezwaluw crew had been waiting in Cherbourg for a decent weather window. They must have been very patient to do so! That's admirable the correspondent says! In the end, their patience is rewarded by a spacious weather window by the weather gods.

So the famous (Dutch) saying: "a patient sailor always has good weather" is true! The weather window would last for at least 48 hours and would make it possible to sail a bit further north. The crew will not predict how far they could get, but to reach Boulogne sur Mer would already be very good. Waiting in Boulogne for the right weather and tide is perfect. They would be a stone's throw away from Dover Strait, the bottleneck to the north!



On October 11th at midday, while the tide was still running against them, they finally left the marina of Cherbourg.

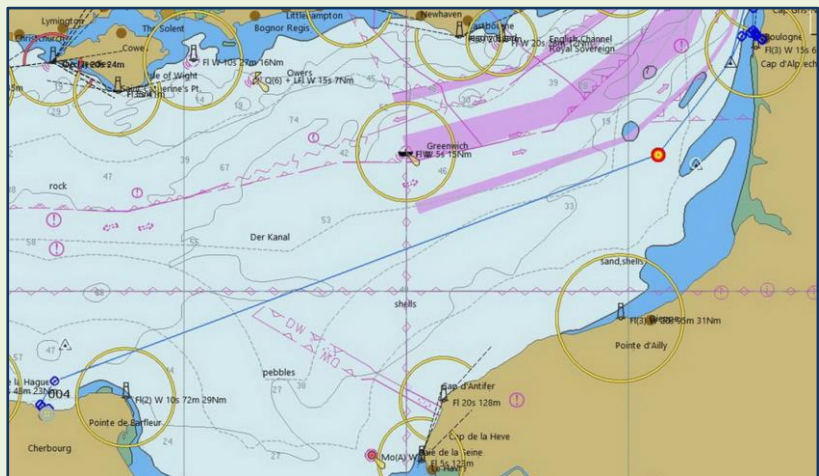


© With gratitude to Wikipedia, Harbour entrance of Cherbourg

The mainsail with 2 reefs was hoisted in the outer harbour but still within the breakwaters. When the jib is unfurled too, the engine can be switched off. Unfortunately the wind is rapidly reduced to less than expected and blows from the north. After muddling for a while against the strong current, Mr. Perkins is allowed to play along again.



Marina & inner harbour Cherbourg

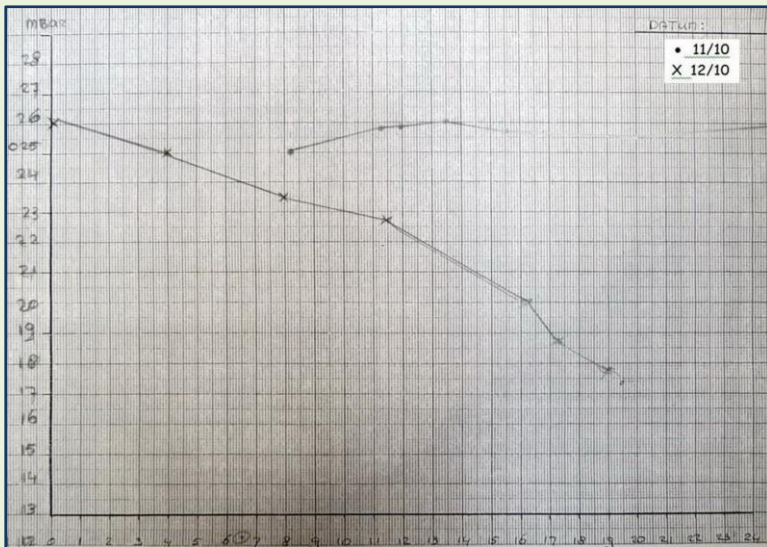


Route from Cherbourg to Boulogne sur Mer in OpenCPN

Zeezwaluw bounces for another hour and a half in the "choppy sea" near Cherbourg, so their progress is very slow. Once released from the strong current area Zeezwaluw can finally sail north with an average speed of 5 knots. The temperature of 10°C is a bit on the chilly side and at the end of the afternoon after a few rain showers they feel the cold even more. Well it is autumn already you know ...

The crew has hardly appetite so is not very keen in warming up their dinner today. Fortunately a ready sandwich does the job. With watches of 1.5 hours each, due to the low temp and the many ships around them, they get through their first night well. There are especially many fishing vessels, but they behave correctly and they have switched on their AIS too. Zeezwaluw's progress is steadily towards the north-east while motor-sailing.

At 5 p.m. the next day the barometer drops 1.5 mB in 1 hour, after it had already dropped by almost 1



mB/hour during the whole day. With a look at the slowly approaching dark skies behind them, it is for sure to assume that strong winds of 6 Bft or more will reach within a few hours.

Studying the chart the options are considered. In half an hour the current will be turning against them and together with the moonless night (it is new moon, with the biggest difference between low and high tide, i.e. the strongest current) and a lot of shipping in and around the shipping lanes, so it doesn't seem a good plan to proceed in

such circumstances!

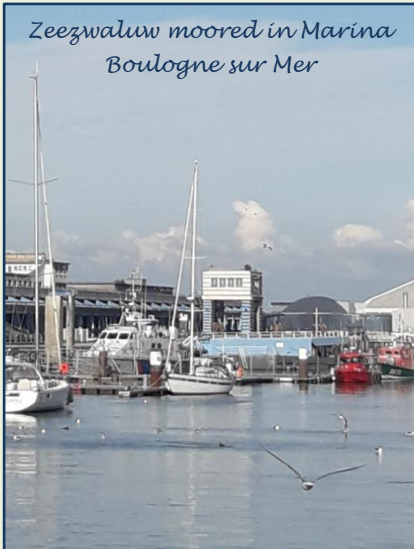
A few miles further along the coast lays Boulogne and they decide to take shelter in that marina instead of continuing and taking the "hurdle" of the Chanel that night. They prefer just a little stop-over in Boulogne sur Mer to be able to sail during daytime hours through that difficult stretch of water.



At 7 p.m. after 147Nm, they moor at the outside of the jetty in the marina of Boulogne sur Mer. A great spot! The harbour master, who was just about to go home, quickly hands over the card which is needed for opening the outside door and shower facilities.

Tomorrow the official entry can be handled in the office. After a drink in the cockpit, a delicious (almost) undisturbed night's sleep in a warm bed follows.





*Zeezwaluw moored in Marina Boulogne sur Mer*

The seagull colony present disagrees with the mooring of the Zeezwaluw on "their" dock. They make continuously a loud noise during the night and at the same time shit all over the dock!

The next morning, the harbour master tackles this pollution with great difficulty even using a high-pressure cleaner.



*The shitty pontoon*

The weather forecast for the next 4 days is not favourable for further hopping along the coast. Don't worry; Boulogne is an unknown city for the crew so they will be exploring it extensively. A nice stroll through the modern shopping streets of the city ends at the old fortified city centre.



*Main shopping street*

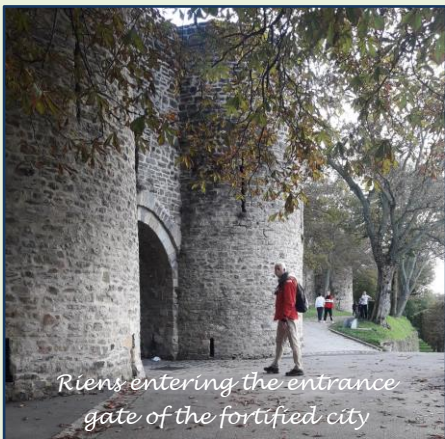


*Beautiful wall painting*



*Spacious squares in Boulogne*

Via tranquil authentic narrow streets with beautiful old buildings, shops and squares they arrive at the old cathedral which turns out to be closed. Before leaving the old fortified part through the entrance gate, they find the viewpoint on the restored city wall on the south side, based on the city map.



*Riens entering the entrance gate of the fortified city*



*Statu well from the wall path to town*

This viewpoint is located just above the monument in honour of Napoleon Bonaparte's "relationship" with Egypt while the view over the modern city to the Ocean is magnificent!

On the walk back they find a supermarket to stock up on a French threesome "pain, vin et du Boursin".

*View over Boulogne from the old fortified walls*



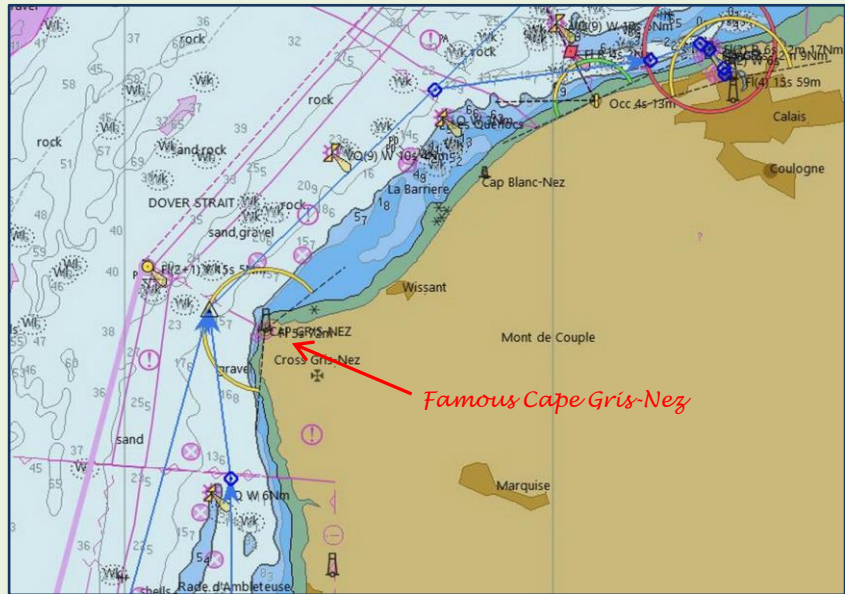
*Monument of Napoleon Bonaparte*



On October 17, after a few days of strong winds and heavy rain, a tiny weather window pops up. At half past eleven with dead tide, Zeezwaluw leaves Boulogne.

There is no wind at all; they only produce their own sailing wind. The mainsail, which is already stand-by, first stays tied to the boom until there is some real wind. Quietly sailing on the engine along the coast Cap Gris-Nez is getting closer and closer. The current is running with them with a speed of 2 knots, which is a bonus.

Less beautiful is that the sky is getting darker and darker while it starts drizzling. Then, suddenly out of the blue, a few miles south of the Cape 25kn of wind thunders right head-on over Zeezwaluw. The now "wind-against-current" situation in relatively shallow water of 50m does not provide pleasant conditions. The metal top corner of the main, still attached with sail straps, tries to escape. In the bouncing waves and strong winds a sprint is pulled forward to prevent this. When the sail is tightened again with extra lines, the crew is prepared for an uncomfortable ride along Cap Gris-Nez without a view of the White Cliffs of Dover.

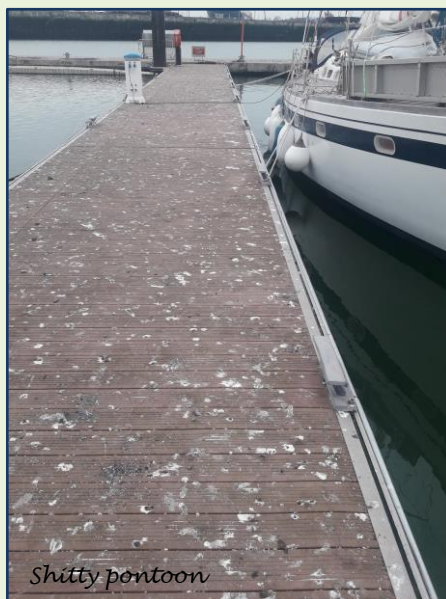


Exasperatingly slow and with a lot of engine power they round the famous cape. After the rounding follows a change of course to the northeast and finally there was peace and quiet on board again. The rain has stopped; the wind has strongly diminished again blowing from the beam while the current is again pushing Zeezwaluw into the right direction. Behind Zeezwaluw the sun breaks through the clouds again and there they are, the "White Cliffs of Dover".

After an exciting 46Nm in 7 hours, they decide to call at Dunkirk, the last port in France. Once safely



Zeezwaluw in marina Dunkirk



Shitty pontoon

moored to a completely empty but with white shit covered dock, they can relax. Still in full sailing gear, they go to the harbour master to ask if they can stay at the mooring place.

There is no problem they are told. With the door operating entrance card and sanitary facilities in their pocket, they return quickly to Zeezwaluw. As fast as possible they plug in the shore power, turn the electric heater on

"high" while they strip-off the soaking wet sailing clothes finally.

Getting warm and having a glass of wine in the meantime is a welcome treat which they certainly have earned it today! Tomorrow they will check the weather forecast in detail to see if and when the next hop will be possible.

Their stay in Dunkirk became not 1 but 2 days. At first the weather forecast for Sunday 18 October seemed good enough for a hop. Nevertheless, this time it was not the wind speed that kept the crew inside, but a full day of rain showers together with low ambient temperatures. Even a short walk during a dry period in the vicinity of the harbour is not really luring. After all, the harbour is situated in the middle of an industrial area. Inside Zeezwaluw where the electric heater snorts, it is wonderfully warm while the seagulls are camped pathetically on the wet jetty. The tide difference is already a lot less in Dunkirk than in Boulogne (8-9m), but still about 6 metres. Luckily you do not notice this at the floating pontoon!

Monday 19 October at 10 a.m. Zeezwaluw leaves the marina with a strong breeze from the south and the tide running with them. Zeezwaluw is not the only yacht outside. Just in front of them are already 3 sailing yachts under full sail heading to the north too. With the following wind they keep motor-sailing while only the headsail is unfurled. This is more comfy on the downwind course close to the coast of Belgium.



The relatively shallow sailing route (10-20m, sometimes 5.5m) runs all the way between sandbanks. Fortunately, the water is fairly flat while the sun is out from time to time. Finally they have a wonderful autumn sailing day.



*Flat sea*

Cormorants are sunbathing on several buoys ... or would they be waiting for a fish to swim by?



At 5 p.m. when the tide starts running against them, they are close to Oostende and are able to enter without any problems.

In the Royal North Sea Yacht Club (RNSYC) they moor at the inside of the outer jetty. However, there are orange signs with ships names on it. To be safe they moved to a nice empty spot on the long jetty under the quay wall plastered with oyster shells.



*Zeezwaluw in marina Oostende*



The harbour office is already closed but they can contact the harbour master by telephone. However ..., they do not have a Belgian SIM card and the Azores SIM does not work. Luckily they find an email address and send a message.

Pretty soon, the harbourmaster answers that they are fine at the chosen spot. Electricity and water are available on the jetty and they get the code for the fence door. The full check-in procedure can be done at the harbour office tomorrow. Once again, Zeezwaluw is the only occupied sailboat in the marina!

After a wonderful night's sleep, the harbourmaster visits the crew at 10 o'clock just to say hello. He tells us that shower-, toilet- and washing facilities are closed because of the new Covid-19 rules. Restaurants and bars are closed as well and there is a curfew from 24 - 5 a.m. Free Wi-Fi is available

so if there is anything they need they can reach him via WhatsApp. He will be at the marina on weekdays from 8am - 4pm.



A little later that afternoon, the crew suddenly sees that the flagpole with the club flag on top and underneath the Belgian flag now has the Dutch flag hoisted as well. This is to greet the foreign yacht Zeezwaluw (us) in their marina.

This is an old custom that



you won't see almost anywhere else anymore. The last time this custom was seen by the Zeezwaluw crew was in 1998 in the Marina of Helsinki, Finland.

On Friday the 23rd of October it appears that the promising weather window for Monday had vanished. A new at least 4 day storm front (the remains of hurricane Epsilon) throws a spanner in the works. In the short, this means no hop to the Netherlands yet. It does mean that the Zeezwaluw crew will have to be patient again until a new weather window appears.

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