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Cruising Association



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The month of September has been clouded by the horrible terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and I feel sure you would want me to express our sympathy and good wishes to all those who have relations or friends involved. We must also trust that those in government will be guided wisely to eradicate this form of aggression from our lives.

The Southampton Boat Show always seems to preface the end of the sailing season. This year the weather has surpassed itself. The wind has set into the northern quarter and is blowing forcibly, the temperature has fallen dramatically and the days are shortening all too quickly. Here indeed is autumn! Let's look on the bright side, perhaps St. Luke will bless us with one of his summers through October, so that the sailing gear can be donned again – even if only to move to the winter quarters and prepare for hauling out and laying up. Perhaps this year all the work planned will be achieved! Miracles do happen!

Returning to our own affairs, I have had some response to the news of the Association's financial status and the proposition to raise the annual subscription. However, this is from but a small proportion of you and, much as I know how you hate putting pen to paper, I would appreciate a wider cross-section of views and suggestions, to put to the next meeting of our Committee at the beginning of next month.

We welcome a few fresh members to the world of Catalac sailing. Please add these to your Register.

CRAIG & KAREN MARSH FABULOSO 8.13 CL
77 Churchwarden Lane, East Hoathly, Lewes, E. Sussex. BN8 6BR

PHILIP CORRIDAN GRACE JANE 9.22 CL
Hatherday Farm House, Mill Road, Little Melton, Norwich, NR9 3NZ

PETER HODSON CORONIS 9.42 CL
18 Rowan Grove, Hartwood, Chorley, Lancashire. PR6 7BC

SERGE & ANNIE DESFIEUX CHOW CHOW 9.135 CL
A Cercles, La Tour Blanche, 34320 Verteillac, France.

GUY DE MOREAU TI-PUNCH 9.185 CL
T.B.A.

I hope there will soon be others to add to our list of catamariners.

I received a letter from the *Pougeol* family, owners of the 8m Catalac *AGNES*. They enclosed some photographs - of the before and after classification – showing the great work they have done, now nearly completed, to make Agnes a member of the fleet of which they can be proud. Great work and congratulations. I do enjoy catching up with news from members everywhere, so please keep writing.

Brenda Davison, who with her husband owned the 8m Catalac *RED BANJO*, has had her book published. Having enjoyed the multihull way of life, they moved to something bigger, a Prout Snowgoose, and journey south through the French canals. As Christmas is approaching all too quickly, I thought you might enjoy a taster chapter, before completing your "presents" list. The book, called "*Floating through France*" can be bought through Gopher Publishers U.K. of 14 Harrow Inn Close, High Street, Elgin. IV30 1BP, whose E-Mail address is AMLawsongopher@aol.com.

We are now nearing the end of the journey for *Pinkle Purr* and *Lucien* both of whom, I am sure will appreciate a good long rest on reaching New Zealand.

CHAPTER 1. ENTERING ST VALÉRY

The Odyssey begins

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon when we sighted the coast of France. A cloudless sky arched above us and the sea was calm, as it had been all through the trip. We were tired, having been up most of the night, but exhilarated to have made landfall without mishap. We congratulated ourselves that our first obstacle was over.

On board Chefren, were myself, my husband John, and Hobbs who was crewing for us. Hobbs was a blonde haired giant of a man who's many talents proved very useful as the trip proceeded, and his quirky sense of humour added greatly to our team spirit.

We'd sailed from Cornwall to Newhaven and from there to France, taking it in turns to sleep during the night, arranging the watches so that there were always two people on deck. We left before midnight to catch the tide and arrive in France during daylight, on a rising tide.

The trip was not without event. While off the Isle of Wight I was asleep down below. I was disturbed by a change in the note of the engine. We were slowing down. Trouble, I thought, and quickly pulled on my sailing jacket and shoes. It was early dawn, as I appeared, bleary-eyed, on deck, in time to see Hobbs leaning over the guardrail, with a boat hook in his hand. "Got it, John!" he called, and began to pull something on board. A body? A fish? My sleep hazed mind worked overtime. It was a deck chair, washed out to sea from one of the many beaches on the south coast. It had suffered from its time in the ocean, but proved a useful addition to our boat's equipment. Another heart-stopping moment had occurred as we left Newhaven marina at 23.30 to enter the narrow harbour channel. Heading for the open sea we could see lights ahead of us, and some of those seemed to detach themselves from the rest and move towards us. The terrifying blast of a ship's siren alerted us to the fact that a huge Superseacat ferry was entering the harbour. Pulling into the side to give her a wide berth reminded us that we hadn't called the port radio station to let them know we were on the move. They would have warned us of the approaching ferry. Black marks all round.

Half an hour out, under sail, enjoying a cup of steaming coffee, and with the auto helm steering our course, a noise disturbed our complacency. It was the warning beep, beep, beep of the autohelm. The drive belt had snapped, we were thrown off course and lost the wind from our sails. For the next few miles we went back to steering by hand, no problem really, just a little boring at that time of night, especially as the wind was constant. Eventually the ever-resourceful Hobbs made a temporary repair using some duct tape and staples, which lasted until daylight.

Otherwise the crossing was uneventful, the wind was on the beam, blowing steadily all night, and we used the engine as well to increase our speed. Overhead the moon's kindly beam gave us enough light to steer by and we made good progress. It was an exhilarating experience to feel the gentle breeze on my face, to look up at the graceful curve of the sails outlined against the midnight sky and see the stars winking reassuringly. We were really on our way.

We needed to cross two busy shipping lanes and whilst we were concerned about this we knew the procedure. Hobbs and John had a lifetime of sailing experience, but I was a comparative newcomer with only 11 years of sailing to my credit. However the credentials I had obtained, which allowed me to obtain the Overseas Certificate of Competence, made me (laughably) the most qualified sailor on board.

In the event, the horror stories about heavy traffic had no basis, we only saw two other ships all night, another Superseacat, and a fishing boat. Maybe we were just lucky.

We didn't have a life raft on board, but we did have an inflatable dinghy that we carried ready inflated in davits, and all the usual safety equipment. During the night we wore harnesses when we were on watch, securing us to the boat, and self-inflating life jackets attached to our wet weather jackets which we wore all the time.

In the Baie de Somme, as well as the ever-changing buoyed channel, there is a submerged sea wall that is covered at high tide. To get local knowledge is sound advice for inexperienced sailors, but as we have sailed regularly in and out of the Mersey and also over the Caernarfon bar, we are familiar with buoyed channels.

We had planned to arrive on a rising tide so that if we did go aground on a sand bank we would be sure of floating off again when the tide came in. Like all good sailors we also had an alternative course to another harbour planned should conditions be unfavourable.

There are 50 buoys marking the channel that winds tortuously across the wide bay to St. Valéry at the mouth of the Somme. Realising that these might be inaccurate we approached with healthy caution, looking for the cardinal buoy marking the entrance and hoping to see a local boat that we could follow into the river estuary.

As we approached we could see that the bay was alive with boats. Craft of all shapes and sizes were taking advantage of the summer sunshine and the light airs, many with brightly coloured spinnakers, creating a kaleidoscope of shape and colour on the sparkling blue water. No one as far as we could see was keeping to the buoyed channel, and we were tempted to do the same and head straight for where we judged the estuary to be but, we were British, and the Brits stick to the rules. The pilot books told us to keep to the buoyed channel, and keep to it we did, carefully threading our way from one buoy to the next, avoiding the sailing boats that were taking advantage of the fact that 'power gives way to sail'. It took us at least an hour to negotiate the channel, and we were at buoy 32, well in sight of the line of marks indicating the submerged sea wall, when a local fishing boat appeared from the direction of Le Crotoy on the north side of the bay, and led us into the river mouth.

We then motored down a wide channel bordered on each side by marshes, where it's possible to pick samphire grass and marsh lilies. Amongst the marshes we saw distant figures with shotguns slung over their shoulders. No doubt the local duck

population was being decimated that day. It was the first day of the six-month hunting season, which various bodies are now campaigning to shorten in order to preserve French wild life.

Reaching the outskirts of St. Valéry, we motored along, admiring the rather opulent residences that edged the quay. They were all different shapes and sizes, with ornate balconies and steep roofs. They reminded me of the sea front houses that were part of the Jacques Tati film, 'M. Hulot's Holiday'. We learned later, that they had been built by former ship owners who had made their fortunes exporting salt.

Suddenly we found ourselves surrounded by boats. A marina had been built in the river itself, presumably because this was as far as one could go before the lock into the canal. On our right, finger pontoons protruded into the river where motorboats, yachts, and canal boats, from the opulent to the downright scruffy, filled every conceivable space. On our left was a single long pontoon a little way out from the shore, which turned out to be the visitor's pontoon. A young Frenchman in a dinghy appeared from nowhere to greet us and escort us to a berth. He took our lines and made them fast then welcomed us by shaking each of us by the hand and showing us the whereabouts of the Capitainerie. He spoke no English and I had to exercise my rusty French, being the only one on board with any knowledge of the language.

I had taken a French O level forty years before and had used it little since, except for the few holidays I had had in France in my thirties. I was greatly reassured to find that as the trip progressed fluency returned and I was able to understand and be understood in most situations, with only one or two hiccups. French teachers out there take heart, some of us do learn what you teach and it stays with us – well mine has.

The visitors' pontoon was on the opposite side of the river from the Capitainerie and there was no bridge, instead a fleet of little orange fibreglass dinghies with outboard motors were provided, but at that stage we had no idea that these were for our use. Instead we launched our own dinghy and rowed ashore.

At the Capitainerie we were given a Releve de Balisage - a chart of the bay with the positions of the buoys updated on the 2nd July, only two weeks previously. It is issued by the Direction Departementale de l'Equipement de la Somme, and would have been invaluable to have in advance if we had known of its existence.

Having reported in and paid our dues, we could relax. We sat on a wide veranda outside the marina bar, overlooking the water, basking in the warm sun, surveying the other boats, and taking stock. We were still a little apprehensive, a long trip was ahead of us in unknown territory, but we had successfully negotiated the channel crossing and the Baie de Somme so we felt that a congratulatory refreshing drink was in order, and allowed ourselves to savour our arrival in France.

In addition to the bar, which also served meals, the marina provided water, electricity, rubbish collection, toilets, free showers and hot water. All of these very modern facilities were housed in an attractive wooden building situated above the pontoons on the steep bank of the river, approached by a floating walkway. It was one of the best marinas we encountered on the trip.

The toilet block was unisex. This is often a shock to those coming to France for the first time, but the French take these things very much for granted and it is all very proper.

We discovered a notice, in French, about the little orange boats. It asked users to ensure that there was always one boat left on the pontoon at each side of the river. This posed some difficulties when only one boat remained. It reminded us of the puzzle about the fox, the hen and a bag of grain that need transporting across a river. We worked out a solution involving all three of us and two boats, causing a lot of hilarity as we ferried backwards and forwards. Especially when the motor stopped half way across and the two boats started drifting down river!

We never saw any French people doing this. The French have a healthy disregard for rules and regulations, and for authority generally. This seems to be a legacy from the Revolution when the people executed the aristocrats who had previously exercised the authority. Was it because we were British that we went to such pains?

There was an air of festivity in the town, which was thronged with holidaymakers wandering along the quayside, and taking trips on the petite train that seems to be a feature of all tourist towns. A small white engine pulling two open carriages ran along the road, giving visitors a guided tour of the local sights. As well as this there was a real 'Puffing Billy', which was 100 years old. Its railway line ran along the quay and it occasionally announced its presence by a blast on its whistle, encouraging pedestrians to get out of the way. The route of the train was over the bridge spanning the river just before the lock gates, and its route took passengers to Le Crotoy and to the war museums of the Somme.

Overhead light aircraft circled, trailing banners advertising Spécialité Les Plongeurs Fous, which seemed to be a reference to mad divers, and verbal announcements of other attractions were made by loudspeaker vans which touring the streets. My ear was insufficiently tuned to the new language to distinguish just what attractions they were advertising.

Having a French meal was our next priority, and on Sunday evening we ventured into the little town to find a suitable establishment. We were surprised to find that most of the restaurants were closing by 8 p.m. and had to search hard to find one that was still open. Perhaps it was because it was Sunday, and this was only a small town?

Eventually finding a restaurant we treated ourselves to the 'whole hog' - appetisers, three courses, and wine. John was keen to try pastis Ricard, which he remembered from his previous visit to France. I tried, for the first time a kir, white wine with Cassis (black-currant liqueur) which was to become my favourite drink during the trip.

The meal was memorable not only for the food, but also for the service. When the young, rather nervous, trainee waiter brought our food he clumsily knocked over a carafe of water into John's lap. Fortunately John's trousers were drip-dry, suitable for life aboard, and the water made little impression other than dampening his spirits! The embarrassed waiter provided napkins to mop it up, but I thought he could have been a bit more apologetic. Perhaps it was the language difficulty? Later, the same waiter was pouring our wine, and the maitre d'hôtel (female) came across and lightly tapped his

forearm to make him raise the bottle just a little higher, avoiding drips. Well, they don't mind drowning their guests with water, but it wouldn't do to splash the wine, would it?

The next day dawned bright and clear, the sun beat down from a cloudless blue sky and the night had been warm. We were eager to finish equipping the boat and begin our trip. We visited a chandlery across the road from the marina to buy a new belt for the auto-helm. It was about 11.00 a.m., but whilst we were there they began to pull down the shutters and close for lunch.

Most French establishments close for 2 hours in the middle of the day and stay open later in the evening. We were not surprised by this, nor the turning away of customers, but we were surprised that they should be doing it so early. Walking on into the town we found the Office du Tourisme also closed. This caused us to stop and think. We remembered the restaurants which had been closing early the previous evening, the chandlery closing early, and now this. Peering through the door at their clock we realised our mistake. French time is one hour ahead of English time and we hadn't put our watches forward. I wondered what other gaffes we'd make before our trip was through?

A visit to the supermarché to fill the galley shelves with 'goodies' for our trip was next on the agenda. After obtaining instructions (in French) from the marina staff we set off down a little flagged street of typically French houses huddled together. These were the fishermen's cottages in the heart of the town, single storey with coloured shutters and flowers in window boxes and tubs at the door. We walked a long way and there was still no sign of the supermarché. I took my courage in both hands and asked a knot of people who were chatting at the roadside. I could just about manage, « *Est-il un supermarché pres d'ici, s'il vous plait?* »

We gathered from their reaction that we had walked in the wrong direction and the supermarché was a long way back. Our faces fell, and, as we turned to retrace our steps, they called us back and offered us a lift. I had just enough French to thank them effusively for their kindness, and to introduce us but that was about all. This was our first encounter with ordinary French people and we felt we were going to enjoy getting to know their compatriots.

Something had gone seriously wrong with my translation of the directions we had received and I didn't discover what this was until much later in the trip when I made the same mistake.

St Valéry itself is an ancient town, founded around 611 by an apostle from Luxeuil in the south. The little black and white chequered brick chapel, dedicated to St. Valéry was visible from the marina, looking like a gingerbread house. This building, which was rebuilt in 1878, is said to commemorate where the saint lived and is buried. The main event for which the town is famous is that it was from here, in 1066, that William (*the Conqueror*) set off for Britain. It's a picturesque little place and in 1837 Victor Hugo wrote that it was "charming at dusk, the moon which went down an hour after sunset, descended slowly towards the sea, the sky was white, the earth brown, and portions of the moon leapt from wave to wave like balls of gold in the hands of a juggler."

We stayed for two nights, and were wondering whether to remain another day and do some sightseeing, but made a hasty decision to leave, late on the Monday, when we realised that if we didn't go on that particular tide the sea lock might not be open to traffic the following day, as the tide would be too late in the afternoon. When we saw other boats casting off and disappearing up river we decided to follow.

At this stage we still had our mast in position and had been told we could have it removed once we were in the canal. There was an anxious moment when we realised that we needed to pass through a swing bridge into the lock. All the other vessels, motorboats without masts, had already passed under it. I had to use the radio and ask for the bridge to be swung for us. I couldn't understand what was said in reply, but at the point when we were about to turn back, the bridge opened and we were able to pass through into a wide basin where the other boats were already waiting for the lock gates to open.

When the level of the tidal river reached that of the river on the landward side we went through into a short stretch of canal, which disappeared under another bridge. This was not a swing bridge, and there was no way we could pass through until we had had our mast removed. The boatyard was here at the Quai Jules Verne¹ on the right bank, but it was closed. We would have to wait until morning. The other boats had already disappeared. We had to find somewhere to tie up, but the only available pontoon was fully occupied by French canal boats. On the bank near the pontoon were several dogs and children, whilst the Dads were fishing alongside. The general impression was of a group of boats sailing in company, and we felt we would be intruding if we rafted alongside.

On the opposite bank a huge barge was tied to a small quay and at that moment a dark-haired middle-aged woman, in a turquoise sweater, appeared on its deck and spoke to us in English. She explained that we wouldn't be able to go any further without having our mast taken down (that much had become obvious), but if we liked we could moor alongside their barge, named Maja, until the boat yard opened in the morning.

We were glad to take up her offer and later clambered across their barge (taking care to nly climb across the foredeck as is sailing etiquette,) and scaled up the steep quay using their ladder. Once on shore we looked at the steep crane in the boatyard and discovered where to moor the following day. The occupants of the barge were an English couple, Audrey and Tony, who lived permantly on the French canals. Their beautifully kept boat was an old commercial barge decorated with tubs of flowers and lace curtains at the windows, and a piece of equipment on the foredeck that resembled an old mangle for lifting the anchor.

¹

The following day they had visitors who also lived on the canals. We invited them aboard Chefren and they told us about life on the waterways. We were to meet many such expatriate couples, living in France, full of enthusiasm for the French country and its people, not to mention its food, its wine, and even its health service.

Going ashore to make arrangements at the boatyard, we were shown, by le patron, where to tie up, in a little 'cut' alongside the main quay. He warned us to be careful as we entered because the river current was very strong, and there was also a breeze blowing from up-river. Both of these factors would affect the behaviour of our boat. Tied to the main quay were a number of very smart yachts and motorboats, probably in for storage or repair. Le patron was concerned that we might damage one of these if we were not careful and emphasised his instructions (in French) with hand signals.

John is quite used to handling boats in similar circumstances and had weighed up what he needed to do as we approached, compensating for current and wind. Suddenly one of the employees of the boatyard appeared on the quay, shouting and gesticulating. Whilst we couldn't understand what he was saying, we did understand his body language and his shouts of "Non, non!" as he waved us off. We were very puzzled and tried to explain that le patron had instructed us to go there, but he was insistent.

We backed off, and immediately we were caught by the wind and the current, and found ourselves being taken sideways downstream towards the lock gates. John began what should have been a three-point turn to make another approach but discovered that the boat would not answer the helm and continued its sideways progress. We were not in any real danger but the whole thing was becoming very embarrassing as he attempted to turn the boat around under the scornful eyes of the employee.

Hobbs and I watched helplessly, making ourselves ready with boat hooks and fenders to keep us off other boats and the bank. Hobbs didn't realise that there was a problem with the steering and was itching to get his hands on the wheel. I think he thought John was inexperienced. A couple of days later he had an opportunity to discover the problem for himself. Chefren has an inboard engine, but an out-drive steerable leg. This leg was changing direction of its own accord. In addition, when the engine was put into reverse, the leg was lifting out of the water instead of remaining locked down. What a way to start our trip. Further down the canals we met two other catamarans with similar problems, but at this stage we had no idea what was happening.

After much filling and backing, and revving of the engine, not to mention colourful language, John got the boat round and headed back to the boatyard, feeling very embarrassed. We discovered that the employee had wanted us to tie up at a quay around the corner so that he could warp us round using ropes only, not under engine. He was very concerned about the strength of the current and the possibility of us being swept down onto other boats. In fact, he put the other boats in greater danger by chasing us off as he did.

Getting from the quay to the cut became a major performance. After much throwing of lines, reversing, swearing and English/French translation we eventually managed it. It took us two hours, and by this time it was 12 noon and everything went quiet as they knocked off for lunch. So we did the same, sitting in the cockpit in the sunshine enjoying the fruits of our trip to the supermarché - pâté, cheese, salad and French bread, washed down with a bottle of Cabernet Merlot which had cost us 150 FF (£1.50). We were enjoying this.

On the dot of 2 p.m. we heard the engine of the crane start up, and there was le patron with two of his staff ready to remove our mast. He drove the crane while the two men set about dismantling the mast. They were two very different individuals. The employee who had warned us off was a typical dark-skinned, good-looking Frenchman, with a long lean body displayed to advantage in shorts and immaculate T-shirt. In contrast his mousy-haired companion had missed out in the good looks stakes and had done nothing to assist nature. He was clad in a purple T-shirt and ragged jeans, and had allowed his wispy hair to grow well below his ears. A drooping moustache framed a mouth filled with stained teeth and many gaps. They leapt nimbly about the deck and took down the mast quickly and efficiently. We were pleased with the cost too only 300FF. (about £30.00 English money) later on our trip we heard of charges upto 900FF. at other marinas. It took the rest of the day to support the mast properly it was then so late that we stayed the night. It was at this stage we realised that we had not needed to undergo any customs formalities. We hadn't been asked for our passport, or my certificate of competence - nothing. We were two weeks into the trip before anyone asked for papers of any kind.

When I opened my eyes the following morning, the day was already bright, although it was still early. I found it hard to believe that at last we were on our way into the French waterways, and our dream was starting to come true.

With all our fenders tied to the outside of the boat ready to protect us in the locks, we got underway and passed under the first bridge and into a tree lined canal. Chefren, deprived of her mast, was looking like a graceful swan that had turned overnight into an ugly, ungainly duckling.

The sky was cloudless, the birds were singing and our spirits were high, although it was not without some apprehension that we anticipated our next lock. What would it be like? Would we be bounced around by the sluices; would we have enough rope for the depth of the lock; did we have enough fenders to protect our hull? But the lock was 15 km away and we had some time to relax and enjoy the scenery.

This canalised section of the river Somme stretched straight as an arrow before us, lined with leafy chestnuts on one side, and fields and distant villages on the other.

We found that all the canal banks throughout the trip were lined with trees, planted to absorb moisture and prevent the banks from softening and caving in. The rivers we used, like the Somme, had been canalised by building locks, straightening out some of the curves and strengthening the banks.

There were four swing bridges to negotiate on the first stretch. The first was opened for us and we passed through without incident. The next gave us quite a scare because we did not realise that it would swing, although we could see that it was

very low, and we passed under it. As we did we realised that we had very little clearance, and in fact the top of the Dan buoy scraped the bridge and our crosstrees, which were still attached to the mast on top of the cabin, cleared only by a matter of inches. We set about removing the Dan buoy and the crosstrees thinking that this was a possible height for canal bridges. It was only on reading the guidebook later that we realised our mistake. No wonder the bystanders looked interested!

The English couple on Maja had advised us to buy Navicartes, or Guides Vagon. These are detailed guidebooks to the French waterways which give a map of each waterway, showing possible hazards, and the bridges, locks, quays, with distances, heights, depths of locks etc. They even tell the reader whether a lock is automatic or manual, and list the services available at each tying up point. We didn't manage to obtain any of these until much further on, although we did have a couple of very comprehensive guidebooks to the waterways, which provided excellent information but were insufficiently detailed. We could have obtained Navicartes in Britain had we known of their existence, and I would recommend their purchase to all would-be travellers on the French canals.

If we had had a Navicarte we would have avoided the next little incident which occurred at Abbéville.....

The above is an extract from "Floating Through France, by Catamaran from the Channel to the Carmargue" by Brenda Davison. Published by Gopher Publishers UK, and is available from the author via email on brenda@brenda-davison.org.uk, or from the website www.gopherpublishers.com price £8.99 plus £3 p&p.

It may be ordered by post from Brenda Davison, 28 Wirral Gardens, Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside, CH63 3BH or from your local bookshop.

NO EXPERIENCE REQUIRED **By LUCIEN CONTESSE**

Chapter 38

Thursday 12 October

As I approach customs to clear out, the wharf is completely full of big boats with not even a slot free for my little craft. I hail a freighter and ask if I may tie up to his. The captain says yes and a sailor throws two ropes to me. My mast reaches just up to his railing and Pinkle Purr looks like a lifeboat. They lower a rope ladder to my boat, so that I can climb on to their ship. When I am standing on the freighter's deck, I have a look at my mast toplight and give it a polish with my handkerchief. After all the formalities with doctor, customs and police are done, I climb back to my boat and throw the lines loose. I leave the harbour of Suva under motor power and have a last look back at the reef's entrance. The freighter is still sitting on the reef as a warning to all to be careful. Not far from here I nearly ended my adventures.

The weather is still not good, outside the reef I set sail and immediately encounter a wind of 15 knots. I have no time to get used to the rough sea, especially as the wind is freshening up to 20 & 30 knots. With the wind abeam on a southerly course I make good speed. *The sea is so restless that I cannot think of sleep tonight.*

13 October

Friday the 13th – no wonder the weather is so bad. At the beginning of this day at midnight, I shorten sail to cope with these conditions. It is just too much and too rough. By morning, I have to shorten some more. The watery hills are getting higher and higher and my situation is impossible. At noon, Pinkle Purr is carrying only a storm jib, 3 metres square. An exact position is unthinkable, as the sky is totally overcast and heavy drizzle has set in. Position by plotting only, without compensation for drift or current, E.176.41 S.19.38. My position is not so important at the moment, as the distance to New Zealand is still great. The weather is horrible and it is getting worse. Log 140 miles.

14 October

No sleep for the wicked, not this night. Now and then I nod off for a few minutes or were those only seconds? The push of the waves is too much for Johann, I have to help him as well as I can. The pressure on the rudder is enormous when Pinkle Purr sails on top of the waves or downhill. It sometimes takes all the force I can muster to keep the boat in the direction I want it to go. I am carrying only a small storm jib but, nevertheless, we make at times up to 12 knots. By morning the wind increases its power one notch more. The wave configuration changes to a more comfortable direction as the wind shifts. At 10 am. a tropical rain hits the boat with such strength that I prefer to stay inside the cabin. After this rain, everything is over. The wind has stopped completely and only the waves run at their old speed and in the same direction. After a while, the sun comes out and I take a shot. Position E.174.46 S.20.53. Another rainstorm comes by and splits my mainsail in two. I rush outside and drop it in a hurry to avoid more damage. The rain is so heavy that I think I am wet through even under the skin. One of the seams, which I thought was in good nick, had parted along a length of 5 metres. After the rainfall it is calm again and I start my repair work. I do not like to put the wet sail on to the sewing machine, but I have to, if I don't want to sew by hand for hours on end. When half the work is done, I run out of thread. I know that I bought two big rolls of it in Fiji, but where did I put it? After turning a few drawers upside down, I find it and on goes the

work. It takes me two more hours to finish the sail and by then I have an unbearable headache. I take some pain killers but, in this case, the sail comes first and the head has to wait. I hoist the sail, which offers no problem. A light breeze sets in. Hopefully it will stay that way, I could do with a bit of sleep. Log 134 miles.

15 October

I can sleep the whole night. The boat moves along at three knots. The wind has shifted again and blows now from the north, at about 10 kn. Sailing is a pleasure and the weather is nice. By noon, the wind stops for a while and then comes from the south. As I have the wind directly on my nose, I have to divert to S.W. This is the place of the variable winds, so no wonder they come from all directions. The sun is shining and gives my morale a boost. Log 64 miles.

16 October.

The wind has changed to S.E. My course is as near south as possible. The waves bang constantly against the bow and the midsection of the boat with a nerve-wracking noise. I change more to westerly direction to avoid the hammering. By 8.00 am. a new disaster strikes and the main splits at a different seam. I hope that is not becoming a routine. I take the main down for repair and set, instead, the No.2 in a flying manner. This keeps me more or less on course. Johann works hard, as the imbalance of the sails pushes the boat in a different direction. After five hours of sewing (God be praised that I have a sewing machine) the main goes up again. Johann is relieved and steers less erratically. Writing today is once more difficult, as the road we are sailing on is full of potholes. Noon position E.173.49. S.22.39. I am tired and hungry, as I make myself something to eat. My freedom does not last long. A huge wave drives Pinkle Purr off course, so that she makes a 120 degree turn. This unexpected movement lets the main boom swing to the other side of the boat and then back. With the noise of a gunshot, the main is ripped apart and hangs in tatters. I am too tired to do more than take it down. It will just have to wait till tomorrow. I set the storm jib as a main, which looks ridiculous but Johann likes that configuration for some reason. Log 71 miles.

17 October

I have so many pieces, I don't know where to start repairing. After 8 hours hard work, I finally have done it. I set the main again and try to reef it to half its size, so it does not have to bear so much stress. The wind is too strong and I cannot do so. I have to wait for a better occasion. The SE wind blows constantly at 25-30 knots, but it shouldn't be here any more. Because of these silly wind conditions, I have already passed the most western point of the North Cape of New Zealand. I hope the wind will change soon, otherwise I will have to sail a long way back. To get a sun shot is a balancing act. The boat moves like an unbroken colt. The sea very generously gives me unwanted showers, especially when the waves ram the boat at certain angles.

Shortly before sunset I have more repairs to do, but this time of a more serious nature than sewing sails. Usually in bad weather I get a little water trickling down the railing supports into the boat. I have never found out exactly where it comes, through, averaging about 2 litres of water a day. This collects in the forward bilge. At today's control and emptying ceremony, I get rather a shock. The bilge is full to the floor boards. That means I have collected 50 – 60 litres of water. I empty the bilge and check the forward compartment. It is already full again. This gives me a nasty feeling. If I don't want to bail water all night, I have to find the leak pronto. I take the working jib down but leave the storm jib rigged. At the moment it replaces my main. That gives great stability to Pinkle Purr in these horrible conditions of drifting. For how much must I drift, till sail and the leak are repaired? New Zealand is getting further and further away.

I find the leak in the right forward cabin, where the middle section and the right hull are joined. The architect of the boat had done a great job there! The cabin floor of the forward mid-section where the double bed is, had been fastened with countersunk screws. The screws, 64 in all, had been sunk half through the wood and then puttied over, so that the cabin floor, from the inside, looked perfect. In wind strengths of 15 knots or more, the waves run against this part of the boat all the time. The pressure of the water is tremendous and this is probably the most stressed part of the boat. To make a long story short, the countersunk screws worked their way through the timber and left neat round holes behind, through which water squirted into the boat. As these screws were puttied over, I did not know they were there. The mattress of the double bed covered it nicely. The little fountains of water which entered added up to a cup or two every time a wave struck, and there were thousands! This stupidity of engineering makes me so mad that I can't stop swearing. I wish that those guys were in a situation like this in the middle of the ocean. That would give them something to think about. I remove all clothes and food stuffs, which of course are wet once more. I inspect the damage closely and I am astounded that I still have a floor in the forward cabin. As the boat is drifting at the moment, there is no pressure on this part. I screw the original floor back to the lengthwise stiffeners and then put a 15 mm. Plywood sheet over it. This covers the whole bed area. Then I screw everything down with heavy counter sunk screws and special washers, which prevent the screw from penetrating the timber. Now my floor should be twice as strong and I expect no further trouble from it till New Zealand. I let the boat drift, to give the resin glue time to set and keep all screws watertight. Deathly tired, I drop into my bunk at 2.00 am. log 90 miles.

18 October

I check every hour but can't find any more water after my repairs. Everything seems to be OK. That was a very dangerous situation and I could have easily lost my boat. Throughout the morning I clean up and have a rest. I am still tired from last night's ordeal and lucky to be alive. The weather is as ghastly as ever and the waves are running high. How much is my drift by now? I could be in record time in Australia, but I am going to New Zealand. I drift further and the mainsail repair has to wait. At 9.00 am. the sun comes out for a few minutes and I get a shot. With a little bit of luck, I see it again at noon and get my position. My luck is holding and my position is E. 172.15, S.24.24. The drift is not as bad as I thought, about 15 miles in 12 hours. By 3.00 pm. I am ready to hoist the main. I reef it to one third and hope it can stand the strain. The repair is not bad at all, considering the cramped space I have to work in. A household sewing machine is just not big enough to get the bulk of a mainsail through the arm. The fabric seems to be tired, after 18 years work. I will soon have to buy another one. That will make another hole in my finances, which are diminishing at a frightening speed. I will have to find work somewhere soon. I hope New Zealand has not too much red tape. Log 52 miles.

19 October

The night is more or less quiet. The noise is bearable. The morning brings a heavy overcast and that puts me in a depressed mood. Slowly the sun burns the cloud-cover away and by noon I even get a position. E.172.34 S.25.49. The wind has lessened in the last few hours, so that life is more comfortable. I should let the main out to get more speed but the lessening of the wind could be a deception for a short while, so I leave the main as it is and take it easy. I have about half the way to New Zealand behind me and should be happy. All the troubles and danger are forgotten, as the sun warms my back. *Sometimes it would be nice to have a second person on board, specially in certain situations, when I would feel safer. But the boat is too small and, on second thoughts, I don't have to get angry at anyone except at myself.* Today is one of those days, when navigation gives the brain something to do. The sun culminates at 12.15 pm but, at 12.00 am. the date in the Almanac changes. For me it is 12.15 pm or just after noon, but for time in the Almanac it is 15 minutes past midnight in Greenwich or Basel. I have to change from 18th in the middle of the day to the day of 17th to get the navigation right. It is confusing but, the brain is kicked into gear to solve the problem. At the moment it is practically calm. The miles counter ticks over very slowly today I am enjoying it.

20 October

It is quiet most of the night. Around 2.00 am. as a light breeze comes up from the north, I change course and sail set. This is a surprise and I do it willingly. By dawn we make 5 – 6 knots. The wind helps me to compensate for the lost distance when I overshot New Zealand and I can now make south at the same time. During the night, plenty of dew has fallen on to the boat. This has not happened for a long time. The barometer stands on high. Will that mean better weather?

I have a good breakfast, fried elbow macaroni, left over from last night, with plenty of cheese, two eggs from Suva and a tin of peaches. Of course I do not have such a king's breakfast every morning, but it did me good and that is the main thing. Unfortunately the day does not end as luckily as it started. Shortly before noon the sky turns black and down comes the rain. A gust from the south rips the jib to bits in one big bang. As I try to roll it in, the furling gear jams and that is the end of the jib. The ten seconds I need to change course to take the pressure from the sail, is ten seconds too long. The jib hangs in strips and small bits on the stay. The rest is blown into the water. Of its 15 square metres about one is left. This is a 100% write off. What a disaster! The wind changed from north to south without a warning and I was sailing south. Affected by this sudden blow, the waves try to change too, but that takes time and the sea is very confused. I turn around and run to the north to save my main. The whole spook lasted 45 minutes and now we are sailing south again, minus one working jib. The wind has shifted definitely to south west and the weather looks bad now. My noon position I can only plot, as I have taken wrongly the reading on the sextant, or the time on the chronometer. Log 70 miles.

21 October.

I am passing through three rainstorms of such force that I take down all sails. By morning everything is over and we have a glorious sunrise. The wind is blowing directly on my nose and I have to tack to the east. Every 4 hours I am changing course. I am beating as hard to windward as possible. This does not take me much to the south. My speed is greatly reduced and the hammering of the boat is within reason. I made 50 miles in the last 24 hours but only 10 miles south. A wretched result for all that bother. Hopefully the wind will change soon. I have to repair my speedometer once more, just to stay in practice, as if I had not enough repairs. The weather all day is nice and sunny, which compensates a bit for all the work I have to do. A cool wind blows from the south and I have to wear trousers and a woollen pullover. How cold will New Zealand be? Position E173.23 S. 26.55. Log 10 miles.