

Isles of Scilly Planning Workshop via Zoom 27 January 2022

By Bob Walker, Secretary WOA South West Group.

Hopefully many of you reading this article will have experienced the pleasant feeling which follows a successful achievement. I can genuinely say this is the feeling I have following the workshop held on the Zoom platform and the flurry of Emails I received immediately after the event certainly endorse this view. Successful or not, it is good practice to Learn from Experience (LfE) and to pass on the findings and this article will go a long way towards this aim. I am also going to use this opportunity to follow up with some key points which came out during the workshop which may prove beneficial to anybody hoping to include the Isles of Scilly in their sailing plans at any time in the near future.

Credit must go to Julian Davis, Sally and Phil Loynes who made up the expert panel and delivered the main event.

Let me kick-off with an explanation of why I thought this was a good idea to do.

Largely because I want to sail to the Isles of Scilly but never had had the time to do it. Now in retirement, I felt that it is time to put more water under the keel but my own analysis of the risk, and there speaks the Engineer in me, caused me to hesitate. In casual conversations with other yacht owners, I gained the feeling that I was probably not alone which largely amounted to a lack of confidence. Now that is a big statement from me having spent over 30 years at sea as a profession and didn't have the confidence to sail my own yacht to the Isles of Scilly. Maybe I know too much? I therefore figured, that if I was to go on a quest to improve my knowledge in order mitigate the risks, and if there are others like me then we should all try to benefit from this exercise.

A small hurdle to overcome was to work within the WOA rules and I urge that anybody who is thinking of organising similar events such as this that they familiarise themselves with the rules around liability which can be found in the Constitution Rules Section 15. As such, I wanted to steer away from 'Training' and hence the concept of a 'Workshop' where we could talk about knowledge and experience by frequent visitors to the Islands seemed much more appealing.

It is one thing to talk about sailing a yacht to and around the Isles of Scilly but if you are like me, I learn much more by doing it, mistakes and all. So, this workshop was just the first step, and a date has been put in the South West Group (SWG) event schedule for a Meet Afloat in the Isles of Scilly between 03-06 Jun 2022. Any later than this, then there is a risk that the islands will be crowded with visiting yachts from Europe. A key suggestion from the expert panel prior to the workshop was to entertain the idea of grouping yachts based on their preferred dates and trying to match them with a least one experienced crew and yacht who are planning to visit the islands around the same time. The benefit of this is that a small group arriving in the islands at a busy period are more likely to find moorings and anchorages and it also makes possible the option for Sailing in Company at least from mainland Britain. Prior to this, I fully intend to hold another meeting via Zoom to confirm the groups, dates and locations.

In terms of the Zoom event itself, the original invitation went out to the SWG who total about 70. The initial response produced 12 expressions of interest but 4 of those included the 3 panel experts and myself. The WOA membership across the South West region boasts almost 340 registered members and hence a much larger pool of sailors. A second invitation was sent out to include all the registered members in the SW and this produced an immediate flurry of replies which eventually

totalled 70 expressions of interest. On the night, 72 people logged into the workshop, many of whom were couples and so the total audience was probably around 90.

The panel had decided earlier that they wished to be in one room during the workshop. The benefit of this was that they could confer off microphone and the transitions between the presenters was much smoother.

In the room, I set up a separate laptop out of the picture from which I could flick between screens and monitor the questions and comments coming in on Instant Messenger (IM) without distracting the presenters. This worked very well.

I was also mindful that as I collated the register of attendees, there were quite a few who I would say are experienced sailors around the Isles of Scilly and quite clearly these people deserved an opportunity to speak and pass on their experience. Almost at the last minute, I added into the agenda a 20-minute slot for these people to speak and it proved to be the icing on the cake.

Questions by IM also helped the workshop to run smoothly, and my thanks go out to the expert panel and those on Zoom who ably answered some of the trickier questions.

Events such as these do rely on technology and even though I had completed end to end testing of microphones, speakers and laptops several times before the workshop started, the desktop microphone/speaker failed to connect when the Zoom workshop opened. Despite my frantic attempts I finished up resorted to sharing a Jabra headset between us which was a bit clumsy, but it worked.

Finally, I will wrap this article up with a summary of the questions and answers which came up during the workshop and a list of very useful references courtesy of Mike Crummy which is a product of his detailed research into sailing to and around the Isles of Scilly. I fully recommend that you take some time out to watch the YouTube videos particularly those provided by Yacht Cadoha.

Thank you to everybody who logged into the workshop and especially to my expert panel; Julian Davis, Sally & Phil Loynes my Maine Coon cat who did an impromptu appearance and best endeavours by my two Cockapoo dogs to follow the cat.

Summary of Q&A:

1. There was some debate as to where to start the final passage to the Isles of Scilly. It will depend upon individual circumstance and the weather but the general opinion of the panel was;
 - a. If coming from the East, then anywhere from the Helford Estuary to Coverack will provide a good starting point. Going further West to Newlyn as an example will add at least another day to your passage.
 - b. If heading down from the North, then Newlyn will be a better choice but also check out Porth Curnow which is featured in one of the YouTube Videos from Yacht Cadoha.
2. Anchoring featured in many of the questions:
 - a. There are plenty of anchorages with sandy bottoms offering a good hold. Avoid areas on the chart showing weed, rocks and sub-sea cables. Use a lookout on the bow to exploit the clear water to see the bottom topography and get the anchor dug into the sand.
 - b. Avoid too much anchor chain especially in crowded anchorages.

- c. Bilge Keel yachts can safely dry out and fin keel boats will find deeper channels for passage and anchoring.
 - d. Keep a regular watch on the weather and be prepared to move around the islands to seek calmer anchorages.
3. An interesting discussion on VAT and Port of Entry for non-UK registered vessels and whether St Marys is the authorised Port of Entry. According to the web site <https://uk-ports.org/ukports-a-to-z-listing-edit-listing/st-marys-harbour-isles-of-scilly/> it is.
 4. The subject of Flares came up and the use of Odeo LED/Laser Flares. There was a good strong argument for the use of Odeo distress flares, but the jury was out on whether they are approved for use in the UK and Europe. They RYA do recommend them.

List of additional references, courtesy of Mike Crummy:

Yachting Monthly articles

1. September 2021 Page 62. Opportunities to explore in an Easterly Wind. (With chartlets)
2. November 2021 Page 12. Storm Survival at Anchor (Storm Evert in Tresco), 70. A Summer Storm. (also about Storm Evert)

You Tube Videos:

Sailing Cadoha. A very open and frank series about initially an inexperienced young couple and their dog sailing to, wandering around, being in the Evert Storm and aftermath, and leaving the Isles of Scilly. They do give a good introduction to the islands for anyone who's not been before.

In order they are

1. **Sailing to the Atlantic Islands** (from Porth Curno – I don't know where that is personally!)
2. **Exploring the Atlantic Islands**
3. **Our favourite Sub-tropical Island**
4. **Vagabond Shipwrecked** (A very real and graphic description of being in a storm on a mooring surrounded by other boats at night in New Grimsby Sound)
5. **Leaving the Isles of Scilly**

Other YouTube Videos worth a look at:-

1. **Entire History of the Scilly Isles** – documentary by Pete Kelly
2. **Sailing Solo from Falmouth in a Rival 32 and Monitor Wind Vane** – James Davis (ok but nothing special)
3. **Finally after 5 years we sail to the Isles of Scilly** – Beryl Mary Travels – a bit long winded but shows St Mary's Harbour very well and how close mooring buoys are!