

Two Best-kept Secrets ~ Tremadog Bay and Ian Farrier's F28CC.

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TREMADOG BAY is formed in the crook between the western coast of Wales and the Lleyn Peninsula, which stretches WSW from the Welsh mainland, just South of Anglesey. With the backdrop of the mountains of the Snowdonia National Park, the area is justly popular in the NW, as a holiday, outdoor and boating destination.

It may be a familiar area to contestants of the UK 3 Peaks Race, the first leg starts from Barmouth, rounds the Lleyn Peninsula through Bardsey Sound, on the way to Caernarfon and Mount Snowdon. It is not so well known otherwise. Solent sailors consider chartering in Scotland or a summer cruise to the South West but mention North Wales and you can hear the incredulous look down the phone. I know I have tried to convince enough people to venture here.

As a cruising ground it is the best kept secret, it has scenery to match Scotlands. In the lee of the mountains, the coast especially the Lleyn peninsula enjoys its own microclimate. The waters are only open up to the Southwest with shelter from the W through N to S. With large open beaches such as the dauntingly named Porth Neigwl or Hells Mouth, to secluded little coves and wide estuaries such as the Glasyn, the sailing can be as simple or a challenging as you want. Whilst Abersoch can be busy in the school holidays, I have anchored in the next bay under the wooded slopes of Trwyn Llanbedrog, and been the only boat at anchor.

In the shelter of the land you can sail all year, I have been out as late as November and as early as February, I have a picture on my wall, sitting on the bow rail, 100yds off the beach doing 16kts in flat water with the snow shining on the mountains behind.

Pwllheli is a good start, recently the subject of extensive re-development the harbour has been dredged, sea walls extended and a training wall in the channel ensures access in all but low water in a strong southerly. A modern marina has gone in with all facilities, boat ramps, an excellent yacht club, chandlers and boatyards. Abersoch is a wide-open beach with extensive summer moorings in an open roadstead tucked behind the Tudwall Islands. Porthmadog is a historic and picturesque traditional harbour.



The F28 Anchored at Porth Ceriad

Barmouth sits in the shadows of Cader Idris. In-between are numerous options for fair-weather anchorages to drying estuaries.

Navigation is easy enough with tidal streams generally weak in the bay. The channels into Barmouth and Porthmadog do



One of the Porth Criad rock paintings

shift from year to year so check with the relevant harbour master first and he will fax you a sketch map. There are two significant hazards. Bardsey Sound between Bardsey Island and the tip of the Lleyn Peninsula, here tides can run at 6kts with associated standing waves and over falls, its no place to be with the wind against the tide. Looking at the chart, the second and most marked feature is Sarn Badrig or St Patricks Causeway. Stretching 11 miles out from the mainland. There is an inshore passage and numerous other passes, and you need to be sure of your position and the height of the tide before making your crossing.

I have been coming to this area for 15 years now, but have never had the chance to cruise in my own boat, till this year, I commissioned our Corsair F28 Centre Cockpit. We keep the boat fully rigged in a secure compound at Pwllheli, I wont tell those of you with marina berths what it costs. Loading straight out of the car onto the boat took a couple of minutes, and in short order the tractor hitched up and dropped us in at the ramp. We motored out the F28 unfolded as we cleared the Marina, extraneous gear was stowed and the sails hoisted.

We had hardly started sailing when we were joined by two porpoises, Sophie and I lay on the lee bow net 18 inches above the water at 8 knots, eye to eye with the most curious of the pair, swimming on his side eyeballing us from 18 inches below the water. As he broke the surface we could have stroked his back. (Do that on a monohull!)

Our first afternoon took us out to Porth Ceriad. Just around the headland from Abersoch it is beach about mile long in a

The happy Crew



large bay enclosed by high slate cliffs. In places great slabs had come away tumbling down slopes to the sea. Setting the anchor out on the starboard bow net, we sailed up the beach. Anchoring entailed just dropping the jib, easing the main to slow the boat, luff up about 20yds off, then drop the boat back on the bow anchor. You can then wade ashore with a second bower. The boat is firmly held doesn't yaw around and can and you can then winch the boat back into 18 inches of water. The family can then step ashore in calf deep water.

Our plan was to sail into Porthmadog; it was a family ambition, as for many years we had a holiday home overlooking the entrance to the Glasyn. Boat-less at the time, I often stared with envy at the convoys sailing in and out with the tides. High water slack, was at 7.30pm, and we had allowed two hours, but it was 5.20 before I could round up the disparate parts of the family.

The bower was dug out of the sand and as the boat swung to the bow anchor, the roller furling main was quickly hoisted. It is an easy task to lift the Fortress anchor over the bow net where it safe enough whilst the boat gets underway. Clearing out from under the lee of the cliffs, it was soon clear that the wind had strengthen somewhat, and whilst I had on my jacket, I wondered if it might have been prudent to wear the full suit, too late now.

Our course took us outside of the Tudwall Islands, there is a reef extending out but with plenty of water it was only evident by some white horses. The boat had the bit between its teeth though and rounding up on a course of 070 and with the wind out of the North our passage was only marked by the streak of foam stretching away behind. Spray would fly off the leeward float, only to be

carried away on the wind, but whilst the float was immersed to the gunnels, there was no feeling of the boat being pressed. Sophie, the youngest, seemed oblivious in the rear cabin reading a book. I could perhaps have eased up a bit for the others, but the boat was on rails, you could steer with the lightest of touches, and my confidence in the boat only grew by the minute. To soon we could make out the fairway, and prudence dictated we curtail our headlong rush. At 6.45pm we lowered the jib, started the outboard and with the harbourmasters fax for a guide, we followed the machinations of this years channel into the estuary. We had just sailed 19 miles in an hour and 25 minutes.

Porthmadog, it would seem, is a bit of a Mecca for multihulls, motoring up between the trots there were six Telstars of various sizes, three Catalacs, and a couple others I didnt recognize. We rafted up against a Catalac, under the shadow of the inner harbour walls. The harbour was built for the export of slate brought down from the mines at Ffestinog by a narrow gauge railway. You sail past evidence of this extensive trade in the form of Ballast Island built up from the ejected ballast from the sailing ships before they loaded up with slate.

After the excitement of the day before, we decided to just mess around in the river. It was also a bit of a late start after the previous evenings refreshments in The Ship. With just the main up we coasted out towards the bar on the ebb, but our late start precluded venturing to far before turning back on the



same tide. There are a few rocky coves off the side of the channel, and here let the boat go aground about two hours before low water.

With the boat secured, we hiked up past our old holiday home to the headland overlooking the entrance. At low tide the channel and order of the markers were clearly laid out. The rest of the afternoon was spent reading the Sunday papers on the nets and sunbathing. I also took the chance to clean the hull sides, beats washing the car on a Sunday.

Port Merion is a couple of miles up the southern arm of the estuary, and we thought we would take the flood tide up to see it. The channel is not really marked and has silted up a lot in the past two years. As soon as we floated off we started to nose our way up, at mid tide the sand banks either side were obvious, but the deeper channel proved an ethereal thing. Soon it wasn't deep enough for the outboard so I waded out in front and towed the boat looking for the channel, in the end time and tide beat us and reluctantly we turned back. With the jib up and the breeze behind we ghosted back down to the main channel, with the daggerboard up and the rudder blade trailing in the water. The sun by now was setting and the vestigial clouds clinging to the mountains behind bathed the whole valley in soft light. The only sound apart from the tonic water was the small wake bubbling up the stem.

My partner, who had joined us for the day, remarked that his sailing always had a purpose, a race or a passage, and that it was a new experience for him to just mess around on a boat. As the Corsair dealer I am often invited to race and I do when time permits. But for me its moments like that described here that make sailing such a joy for me and an antidote to the pressures of modern living.

So that is my second best kept secret, The F28CC is a unique craft, despite its high tech looks; it is in the end a simple and highly functional boat. You might say I would say that. But I was and am an enthusiast long before I was the dealer.

Sailing in Tremadog Bay aboard the Farrier F28CC. This cruising ground offers sandy beaches, rugged cliffs and the Snowdonia National Park as a backdrop.

