

## Rona II Voyage from La Coruna August 2016



It was a busy Saturday afternoon in August when I met up with my group from “The Rona Sailing Project” at Terminal Three, Heathrow Airport. I was nervous about flying as I had not flown since I was a very small child. When I sat in my seat next to the window my heart was pounding. Taking off was even more scary, but the views from the window were spectacular. I looked out of the window and saw the Isle of Wight in the sunshine. Flying across the Bay of Biscay we experienced some air turbulence which did not help my confidence at all. On descent, my ears were quite painful, so that was a mixed experience but a good one I guess.

When we arrived at La Coruna, we went straight to Rona II and unpacked. It was very cramped and hot. There were seventeen of us. We all got to know each other, and carried out a health and safety drill. Then we were organised into our watches. We waited until the next day to take part in Tall Ships Parade; they were beautiful. There was a really massive ship called The Lord Nelson UK behind us, and ten huge boats departing at various allocated times. One of the boats decided to attack us with water balloons, but we were more than prepared for our defence. We had two hundred and fifty water balloons ready under the navigation desk, which we launched at them with great gusto and completely drenched them all. The victory was ours!

We spent the next day on the beach at the other side of the city recovering from our battle. It was a well-earned rest and a great day.

The following day we were forced to use the engine to take us three hundred and thirty miles across the Bay of Biscay as it was the delivery trip from La Coruna to Benodet. There was not a breath of wind to set sail. It was mind numbingly boring, but I had the time to learn about taking logs and keeping up together with all the charts of tide; I also made rough guesses on when we would arrive in Benodet. Upon landfall the weather was hot and sunny, even though there was a storm at sea a day behind us. We were there for four days from Thursday to Sunday and had the chance to really chill out. During the day we would either go shopping or relax on the beach. A highlight of my journey was a lovely walk from Benodet to Sainte Marine in which the beautiful scenery of trees, lakes and all types of boats were a delight.

I learned quite a lot about cooking during this trip. Port and Starboard watch had to take turns doing the cooking for breakfast, lunch and dinner. My friend Henry and I had to do the washing up after every meal which I found very unfair!

In the evenings we usually played cards. On Sunday we set off from Benodet, but once again there was no wind, so we had to use "the donkey" for the three days we were at sea. However, one night was absolutely gorgeous beyond expectation. The night sky was lit brightly with a trillion stars and we could clearly see the Milky Way. There were dolphins splashing about in the bioluminescent water, and the whole world was calm and still. After that beautiful experience, I had to catch some badly needed sleep as I was on watch in an hour.

At two AM my watch leader woke me and the rest of the watch up. I struggled out of my bunk, hoping to see that lovely sky once more but by the time I had got up on deck, the stars had gone in and the clouds had come over. Everything was mind numbingly boring again. It seemed like an eternity, but a few hours later, we were moored up to a buoy in Falmouth.

We grabbed three hours sleep so that we could catch the early tide for Plymouth. Luckily I was off watch, so I only had to be on deck whilst we came off the buoy which gave me the chance to grab another three and a half hours sleep. After a week at sea sleep was becoming a necessity.

The most difficult thing was the distinct lack of wind. I had zero hours of sailing throughout the whole trip. We had to use "the donkey" the whole time. We finally reached Plymouth to a rather unpleasant welcome. First, we had to navigate our way through a tight breakwater past some angry fishermen, then when we were coming into harbour some of the locals decided to throw stones and yell abusive comments at us.

By that time the evening had arrived and the older crew went out to the night club whilst Henry and his naval officer cousin Roddy and I headed out to the best burger bar in town. Whilst I had run out of money, I watched Henry and Roddy demolish the biggest tastiest burgers I have ever seen!

After an unfamiliarly good night's sleep, we made our way towards Salcombe. On the way we anchored just off a famous small island where there was a large expensive hotel where some filming was taking place. We had lunch and a swim, back-flipping off the side of the boat. I had to wash up as usual. After lunch we carried on towards Salcombe. We cast our fishing lines out for the rest of the journey. As I have done a fair bit of fishing, I was allowed to fish whilst the others had to carry out the duties. It was a lovely afternoon. The sun was shining brightly as the elegant cliffs towered majestically against the blue sky.

Whilst we were coming into Salcombe, half the crew were down below preparing the mackerel I had just caught; I was tidying up the fishing lines. It was as though I was in a movie. Mighty emerald trees covered the cliffs down to the water's edge. I was in paradise. I had found paradise in my own country. That night we all feasted on the fresh mackerel.

After dinner whilst the others were down below taking part in a quiz, I sat up on deck and admired the glistening lights of Salcombe, looking like a decked-out Christmas tree rising up the hill. I would happily return and would highly recommend visiting Salcombe, my favourite stop of the whole journey.

I was sad to leave the next morning, but it was time to head home. It had been quite an adventure.