

## Calais Rally 2016

Many of the great adventurers and warriors of history have been here: Julius Caesar (55-54 BC), Richard the Lionheart (December 1189), Edward III in 1346, Henry VIII and Francois I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, and Anne Boleyn while pregnant with Elizabeth I (1532)



*Field of the Cloth of Gold. Henry VIII came with a retinue of just under 4,000 people to outdo Francois I in pomp glamour and extravagance.*

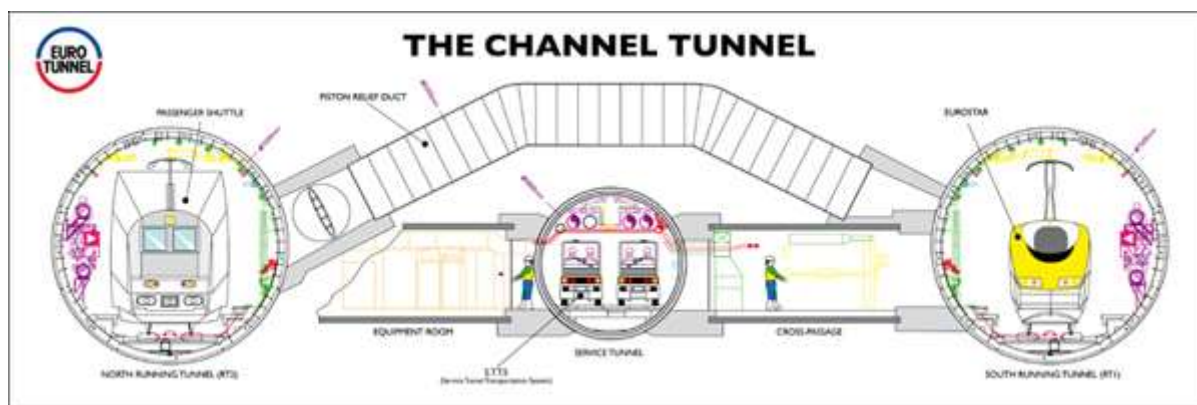
The Spanish Armada Fleet came in 1596, Napoleon in 1805, The Little Ship Club almost annually since 1927, Hitler in 1940 and The Dunkirk Little Ships nearby a little later, after which incivility very little of the historic town was left. Norman Hummerstone was also in Calais in May 1940 where he was hospitalised home and so avoided being captured in the defence of Dunkirk like the remainder of the Queen Victoria's Rifles Regiment.



*Calais May 2015*

The Channel Tunnel opened in 1994. It carries some 21 million passengers a year (half by rail and half by car) and has become a corridor for migrants crossing the Schengen boundary since 1997. Eurotunnel shuttles, Eurostar and national freight trains run in the two single track and single direction tunnels.

The Channel Tunnel is the longest undersea tunnel in the world. The section under the sea is 38km long. The three tunnels, each 50km long, were bored at an average 40m below the sea bed, and link Folkestone in Kent to Coquelles in Pas-de-Calais.



*Poppies on the Track at Calais Fréthun*

The Brussels Eurostar stops at Calais Fréthun with an 8 minute SNCF link to Calais Ville.

The Calais Rally 2016 was not an occasion to visit the remaining sites of the town, which has been under siege as much from collapse of harbour walls as from migrants, apart perhaps from a nod towards the XIII watch tower and statues beneath of Charles de Gaulle and his wife Yvonne Vendroux (who married in the nearby Notre Dame Church in 1921).



The special relationship between Club and town was however enough to ensure that, in spite of the formal closure of Basin de l'Ouest, the flotilla of Club boats and friends from friends from the RNSA (Royal Naval Sailing Association) plus an intrepid rogue vessel from Benfleet Yacht Club – the rest had gone to Dunkirk - managed to converge from east coast ports and The Netherlands to celebrate the weekend led by Norman Hummerstone, in the company of the Club Commodore, and three RCs.

I learned later how straightforwardly Britt (the boat I was sailing on) had got to Calais. The crew had driven from London on the evening of 25th, with a slight delay at Dover due to Eurostar delays, and arrived circa 11:30pm in The Netherlands near Amsterdam where the boat is berthed. Since they were all so excited to see Britt, the briefing – it is alleged - went on into the small hours of 26th! The lengthy sail to Calais included a quiet overnight, with few encounters with other vessels (although they passed a long queue of boats waiting to enter Rotterdam). On the Friday evening they joined up with Mark Turvey and his crew for a nice dinner in Calais. Little did they know the contrast that was to come...





*(My First evidence of the Rally. DR) Proud Flotilla Moored on the south side of Basin l'Ouest. Drinks Party Grey yacht basin with pronounced northerly wind.*



An essential theme from early afternoon prompted by a Beer Call on the host boat *Avventura* at 14:30 to 16:00 seemed to be convivial drinking on pontoons Calais pubs, and a little later associated with the bar at Cercle Amical Maritime with Patricia and Marc Lavoisier as a warm up for the Dinner. It was also the time to compare boats and channel crossing experiences, while casting a more anxious eye on the weather for the return journey.



The Dinner itself was a splendid and well attended affair with an excellent three course French meal with white and red wine, beer and even followed by a first rate glass of armagnac.

There was a wide range of congratulatory speeches by many of the visitors, entertained by Norman Hummerstone who had also prepared some smart menu cards.



*Norman's Menu Card*



*Bertrand Fetel President SRC and Maguy Plard Secretary with Jill Moffatt*



*Marc Lavoisier presents his catering team*



*Welcome from English speaking young Dutchman Sam Kool*

For some the dinner was followed by more pub and Club investigations, followed in one case by a distinct lack of balance with head in the water and legs on the pontoon. Rescue was not thought necessary. The more cautious melted away to their bunks for a good night's rest.

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> came together with breakfast of bacon butties and orange fizz handed out from Avventura to rally members on the pontoon. Norman joined the event by a gracious entrance down the low tide ramp, escorted by Pete Hampson to waiting steps and onto the Rally Leader's boat.





*Norman's grand arrival*





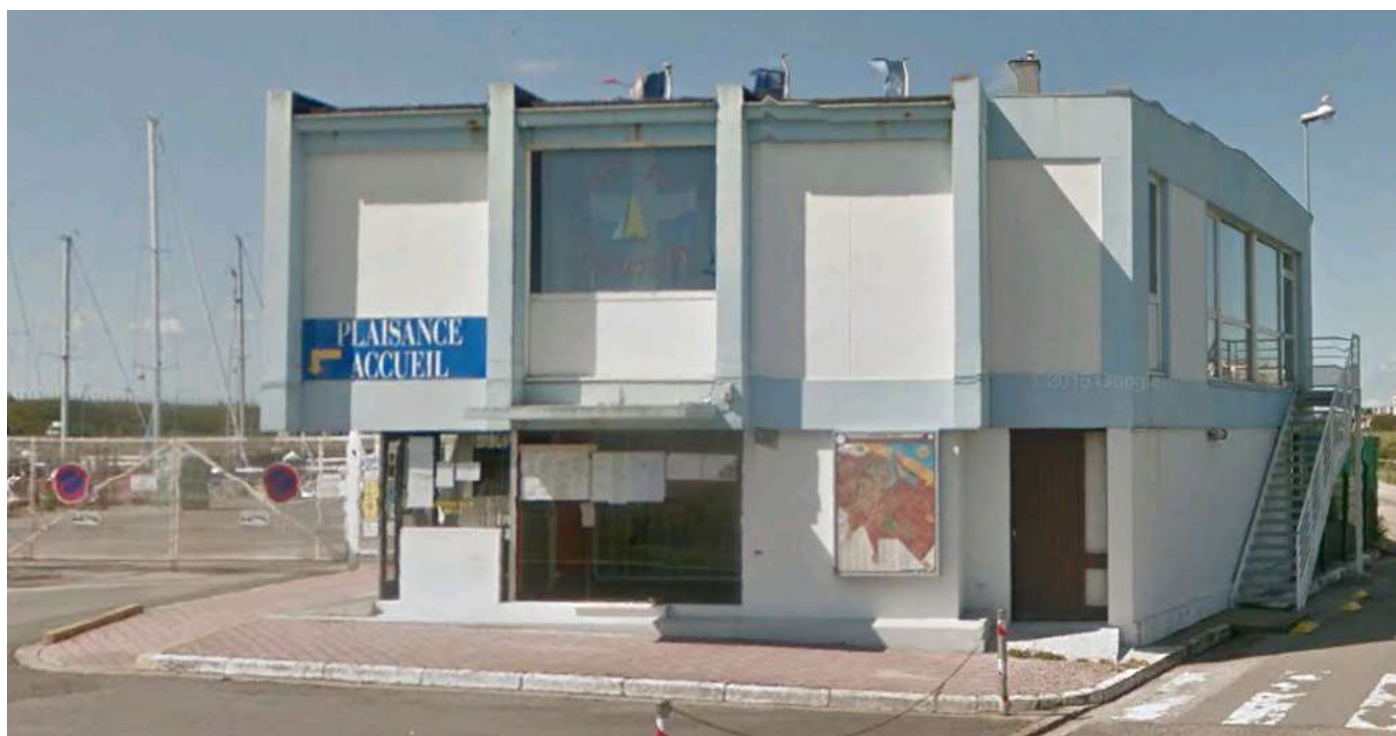
*Morning Pontoon Punters?*

Suitably awakened breakfast was followed by a walk to the other side of the yacht basin to inspect the extensive works to the harbour wall (backfilling of the collapsed quay behind new sheet piling) and enjoy the delights of the Capitainerie (suitably described for visitors as Plaisance Acceuil or more clearly as the bar at the Calais Yacht Club).



*New infilling of northern part of Marina*





*Société de Regatte de Calais*

On this occasion views from the bar outwards were less cheery than the more welcoming views inwards.





*Norman and Alik with our hosts, Société de Regatte de Calais : awards and crisps*  
<http://srcalais.populus.org/>



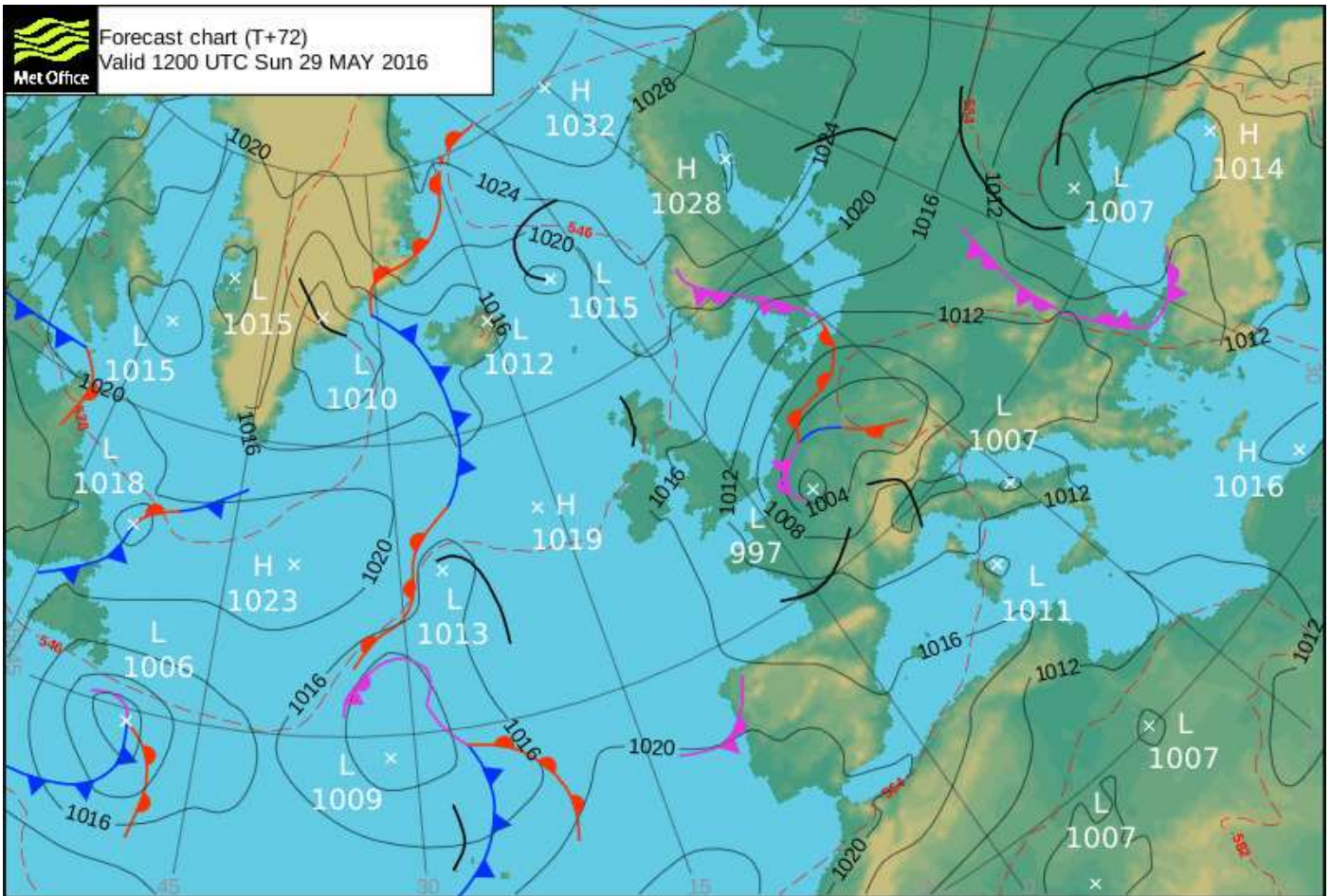


*Award recipient of Diamond Jubilee Challenge Shield Gale Bryan former Secretary RNSA*



*Farewell gift of more pink fizz from our hosts  
Before making our preparations for departure*

The return to the pontoons was more sobering for a serious discussion about the weather and its implications for the various return journeys.



Weather uncertainties were compounded by the complex interplay between a low over NW Europe tracking NE, a High being chased by a low in the Atlantic and low pressure in Scandinavia, but the general impression was clear – it's getting worse, so if you are going to go, go now.

Mark Turvey was quite clear. Blustery Day was not going anywhere. Richard Keen and Sue on Greenwich agreed. Pete Hampson on Silver Pearl did not relish wind on the nose across the Channel and then across the Thames Estuary. Work pressures for *Avventura* were carefully weighed and considered that an early departure for Ramsgate looked manageable. Lindsey Gill also was conscious of work pressures as well as a not unreasonable wish to discover a little of what Britt was capable of. So for some a Sunday departure. For others the delights of France a while longer.

Those leaving thought that full stomachs would assist the trip and so went in quest of steak et frites first and separated into their various crews to prepare to sail or relax.

*Avventura* made it to Ramsgate in two tacks but were hampered by an airlock in the engine and prudently Jonathan Hague radioed for coastguard assistance before entering the harbour in Ramsgate.

Mark and Rune on *Blustery Day* delayed departure until the following Saturday (4<sup>th</sup> June) and settled for Eastbourne for a rest on the return home.

Richard and Sue Keen (Greenwich) also delayed return to Ramsgate until the Saturday in company with other yachts, and then on to Harwich on Monday 6<sup>th</sup>.





*Richard Keen preparing to unraft*

Britt is 54' long (16.45 metres), which takes some getting used to. Warps are larger, the rail is very solid but the cockpit not fully enclosed at the sides. It is made by Aluboot of Hindeloopen on the IJsselmeer to a design by D Koopmans of Lelystad. It has three cabins forward of the all important wheelhouse with table and seating/bunk and a large saloon/double cabin aft leading to a sizeable galley. There is a walk in shower in the heads and wash basins in several of the cabins. Plainly it is very seaworthy. It has inmast furling for the main, a cutter rig with for this trip yankee and staysail. The dinghy is on davits over the stern.

For Lindsey Gill, Paul Kelly, Pam Cassidy, Ray Long and me the first task was to leave the marina over the 2m sill when the Henon swing bridge (operating to a pretty rigorous schedule) allowed. Picking up a buoy in the outer harbour proved a bit tricky with the hook coming off the boat hook and lassoing the chain of the buoy hampered by rope that floats. Paul succeeded in roping the ring finally and Lindsey was able to lower the dinghy to pick up Sara Turnbull arriving by Ferry at around 1730.



Sara, though tired felt sufficiently invigorated by the fresh air and was quickly on the helm getting out of the harbour and heading west to steer around shallow water before heading north east and progressively more north to the mouth of the River IJ at IJmuiden.

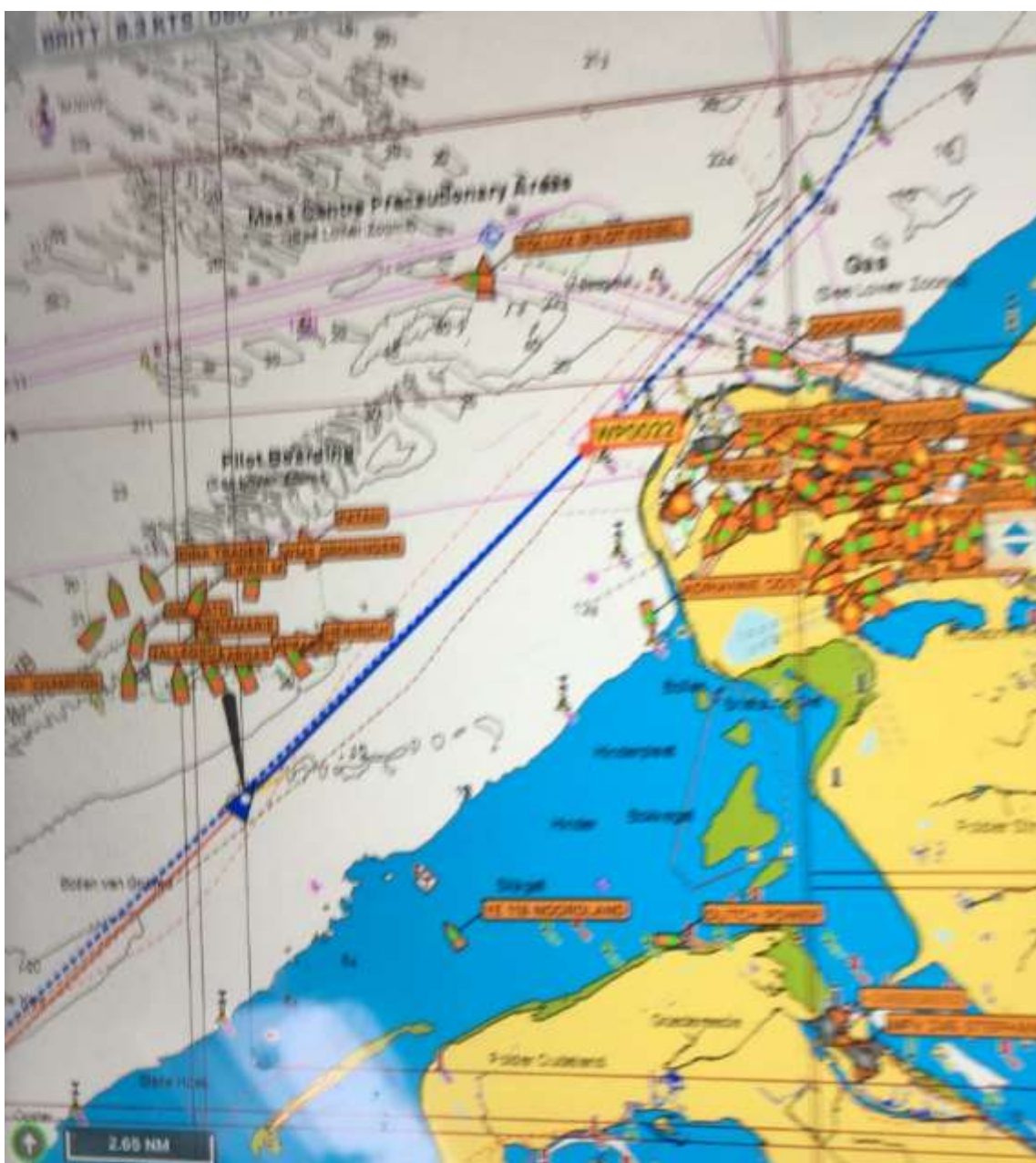
It wasn't long before we shortened sail and then with the wind progressively more on the nose used a limited amount of the main solely to stabilise the boat from yawing. This was the start of 22 hours into a force 7 gusting upwards and into the night with the crew warm and dry in the wheelhouse but slamming wave after wave into a moderate and worsening rough sea, sometimes with wind over tide, sometimes not. The aluminium hulled boat held up magnificently, which is rather more than could be said for the crew, whose varying degrees of incapacity and tiredness increased reliance on Lindsey's careful passage planning, a magnificent Mercedes engine and an autopilot.





*Views from inside the Wheelhouse*

Crossing the mouth of the Maas outside Rotterdam proved on this occasion straightforward as the large number of vessels grouped around the entrance were almost all at anchor. Nevertheless we still used the small boat channel after checking with the harbour master. This wasn't a time to be foolhardy.



Once past this our goal was the open arms of the welcoming IJmuiden harbour. Spirits were rising as we approached the calmer waters inside the breakwater, sail furled, tied warps and fenders and headed for the lock.





We were denied entry to the lock to the The Zuiderbeidenkanaal. We were asked to wait until 1900 hours and so took the opportunity to moor alongside a pontoon and inspect the implications of the North Sea buffeting, which amounted to a sheared brass nut on the Vang and some damage to the dinghy which had a loose mooring rope on the starboard davit and had suffered chafing; relatively small damage from the tons of water being thrown at it.

In fact the lock was opened a little early and we were into the Nordzeekanaal and on to Amsterdam.



*Entering the lock*



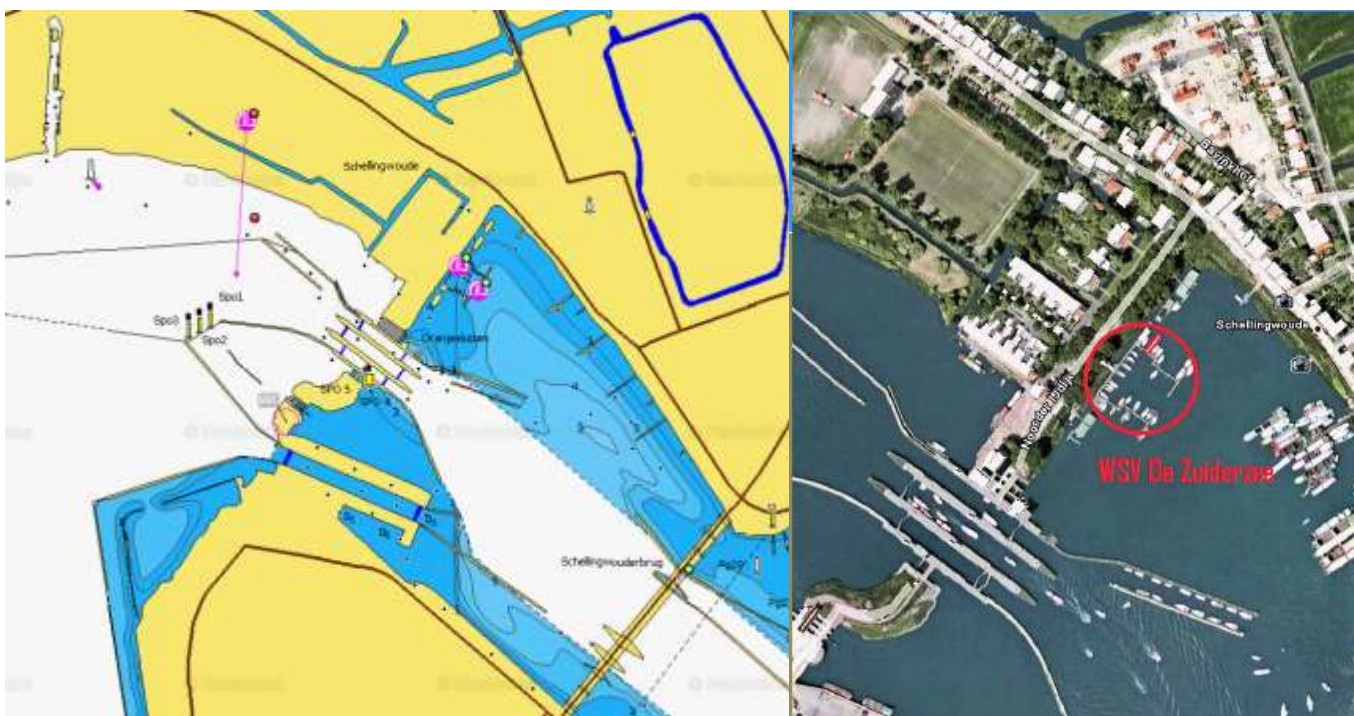


*Amsterdam Station*



*Exhibition Space*





The next obstacle was the bridge on Amsterdam's Ring Road that wouldn't open. Some remote control system was not working and so it needed someone to open it from close by, which was to be at 1000 on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup>. Quick change of plan and we found a delightful little marina called WSV De Zuiderzee close to the mouth of the IJsselmeer at a place called Northern-IJdijk Schellingwoude, i.e. just before the Schellingwoude Bridge. There was no-one official to speak to so we tied up, Pam made a welcome meal and we found tranquillity in a good night's sleep. What a difference a day makes. Apart from some lovely early morning sunshine The Marina's delights included nesting birds beside the pontoon. Mrs Great Crested Grebe was a bit anxious about her egg as she tried to lure this potential predator away from the nest, but Mrs Coot nearby was simply staying put.



*Grebe and Nest*



*Coot on Nest*



The occasion was also an opportunity to consider the boat which had got us here. Britt looked a really serene picture in this quiet retreat miles away from everything but yet close to the centre of Amsterdam. Also time to tidy up and prepare to leave Paul to explore Amsterdam.







*1000. Mass convergence by waiting boats on the Schellingwoude Bridge*

Once through the bridge it was into open water at the southern end of IJsselmeer before heading for Britt's current home port and the car journey home via the Chunnel at Sangatt.



*Home Port. Paul and Lindsey: Admin*





*Ray and Lindsey. Easing Off*



*Lindsey at the Helm*