

David & Vicki Lane Saylor, too

S/V AT FIRST SIGHT, Kinsale, Ireland



Tucker Family aboard AFS in Cahersiveen.



Crossing the Irish Sea, where the weather can change in an instant.

Happy holidays and merry Christmas from Kinsale, Ireland. We arrived here in mid-October, and this is where we're wintering over this year, except for sidebar trips back to the States, and to South Africa to visit our two grandchildren and their parents.

Back in mid-April, when the stormy winter weather finally broke in Cahersiveen, we got underway with Travis, Shelby, and our grandkids, Maebel (7) and Evan (3), as able body crew members for the short transit to a small boatyard on Valentia Island. They were in Ireland on R&R from their posting in Durban, South Africa, where we'll visit them in early 2024.

A week later we set sail from Valentia and quickly made our way around the south of Ireland and up its east coast to Belfast, Northern Ireland, with just a few brief stops in between. Once in Belfast, Vicki found a fine kennel for Saylor, and we left *At First Sight* in the city's trendy Titanic Quarter while we returned to the States for ~2 weeks, principally to attend Charlie's graduation from Emory University School of Medicine, but also to visit with our extended families, and to get caught up on medical and dental matters.

From Belfast, we crossed the Irish Sea to Scotland in mid-May, making landfall in Lamlash, Isle of Arran, in the famous Firth of Clyde. We had a lovely first night in the Firth, but a rude awakening the next morning. The wind had shifted 180° during the night while the tide was ebbing, and we were hard aground by breakfast time. At low tide, we were listing 30° to port, and we sounded just 1.5ft of water with a handheld lead line. Welcome to Scotland!



A very pleasant first night in Scotland...followed by a rude awakening then next morning. We were hard aground!



The pristine water of the Isle of Muck, and on the Puffin Trail at Canna.

Between May and October, we basically circumnavigated Great Britain, spending the lion's share of peak summer along Scotland's famed west coast, reputed to be one of the world's greatest cruising grounds. It did not disappoint. We made more than 30 stops in west Scotland, docking in quaint fishing villages, mooring in picturesque harbour (sic) towns, and anchoring in secluded anchorages.

While cruising the Firth, we took the train into Glasgow one day to link up with Andrew Lowry and Karen Parko, two long-time friends, both of whom have crewed aboard AFS in the past. They were just starting out on the ~100-mile West Highland Way hiking trail, the mere thought of which makes my hips and knees ache. A few days later, while in the vicinity of Largs, Andrew and Ali Miles, two cruising friends from the Balearic Islands, popped over from Yorkshire for ~10 days aboard AFS, including a transit of the Crinan Canal with its 15 manually-operated locks. In sum, we had a wonderful 2 months in west Scotland, and there are more than enough reasons to go back for an encore visit.

Speaking of encores, during the first two weeks of August, we cut across the upper third of Scotland via the Caledonian Canal. Vicki and I had chartered a motor cruiser here back in 2013, and we had been looking forward to doing it a second time in AFS. In fact, it was the prospect of redoing the Caledonian Canal that prompted our 2022 transatlantic crossing to the British Isles in the first place. Cutting through the gorgeous Scottish Highlands was, perhaps, even more breathtaking the second time.

Once through the Canal, we quickly transited down the rather mundane east coast of Great Britain. Noteworthy stops include Edinburgh, where we scored some tough tickets to see its famed Evening Tattoo where the (then) Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Mark Milley, was the reviewing officer. We "dried out" (intentionally grounded along a seawall) in the small fishing village of Port Seton to inspect AFS's hull below the waterline and to visit my mom's only living relative in Scotland. We also anchored off Holy Island of Lindisfarne, England, a small, windswept island accessible by land via a causeway at low tide.

From Holy Island we took a slight North Sea detour to The Netherlands, a place that has been on our bucket list since we visited Amsterdam while stationed in Rota, Spain, 2000-2003. We had an idyllic 2 weeks in early September navigating Holland's famed canals, with stops in IJmuiden, Amsterdam, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, and Den Helder, before crossing the English Channel back over to southeast England, making landfall in Royal Ramsgate (the UK's only designated royal harbour).

From Royal Ramsgate, we zipped westward in the latter half of September along the English Channel as wind and tide permitted, stopping in Cowes (Isle of Wight), Beaulieu River, Lymington, and Portland. Of note in Lymington, we were delighted to have special guests Geoff and June Cluett aboard. They were the previous live-aboard owners of *At First Sight* (nee *Concerto*), and we hadn't seen them since the day in Wilmington, NC, in March 2014, when they figuratively handed over the keys of the yacht they also once called home.

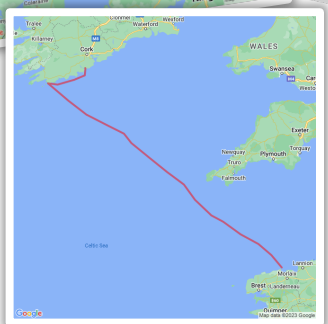
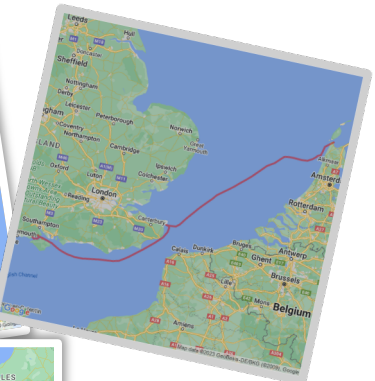
From the south of England, we did our second Channel crossing, this time to Saint Malo, Brittany, France. I've wanted to return to Saint Malo for decades. It was in this ancient, walled, UNESCO World Heritage city that I spent my first night outside the USA, ever, back in June 1978. What a life-altering experience that turned out to be, especially looking back now 35 years later.



From 350m atop North Ulst.



One of three perfect days in Amsterdam



1. "Circumnavigating" Great Britain
2. Channel xing to Royal Ramsgate
3. Crossing from Brittany to Ireland

While we would love to have spent months in Brittany, the benign summer weather pattern was increasingly showing signs of giving way to wintry storms off the Atlantic. And with that in mind, we used the remaining weather windows to make three brief stops in Brittany - Île Logodec, Île Bréhat, and Roscoff - before crossing the Celtic Sea back to the Emerald Isle. We entered Ireland at the Port of Baltimore, spent a few relaxing days on a mooring there, and then sailed to Kinsale, where, as noted above, we'll base for the remainder of the winter.

We closed out the year with a month-long trip back to the good ole USA. While there, we did still more catch-up medical and dental appointments, and visited with family and friends near and far, including Thanksgiving with Ben at his place in Seattle. We're blissfully spending Christmas alone together in Kinsale, and then descending on the Tucker Family in Durban for the month of January 2024.



Christmas in Kinsale



Cincinnati in November



Thanksgiving in Seattle



Christmas in Kinsale



Port of Baltimore, Oct. 2023.