

Hector's Travels - Trip South Part 2 (2018)

Our SC35 Hector spent the winter in Port Olona marina Les Sables D'Olonne from September to April. For us this was a good choice being easy to travel to from our home in Dorset, a very competitive winter rate and we felt the boat was in a secure environment.

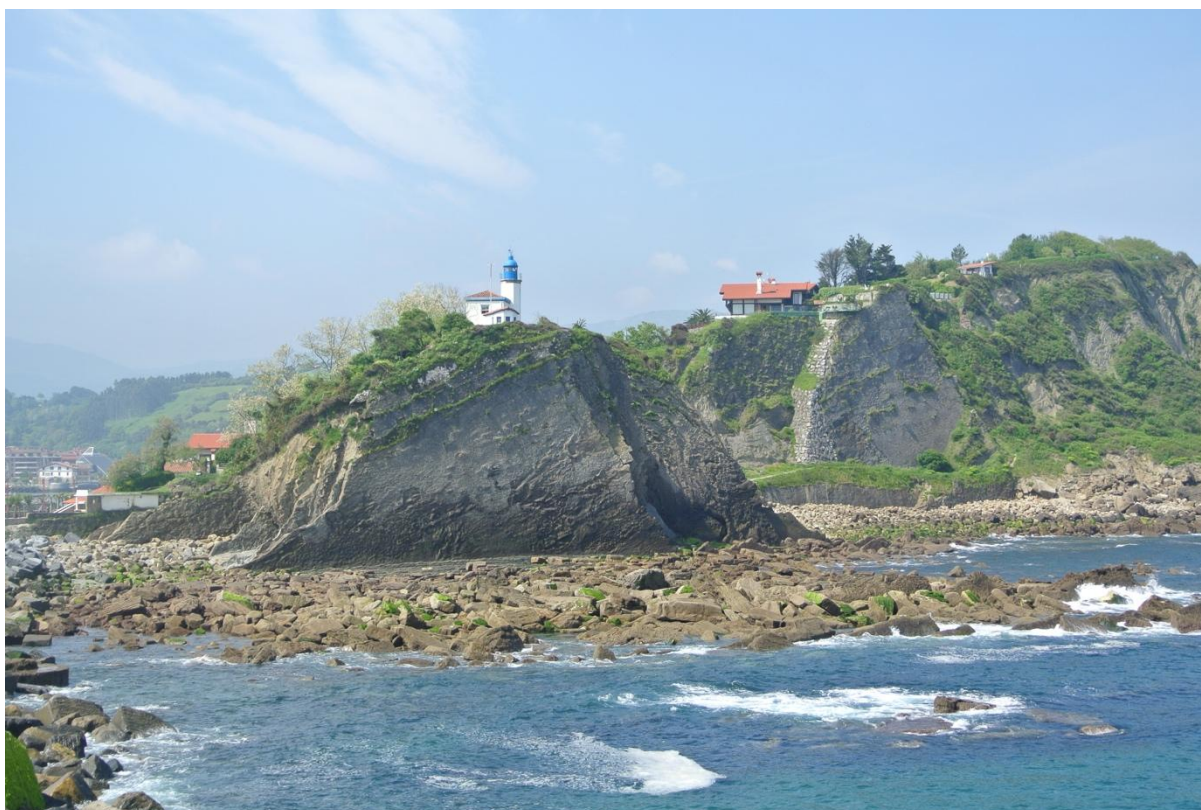
Back to the boat at the end of April and off we went for a sea trial and I knew straight away something was up as the boat struggled for speed and revs. Back to port and arranged a lift out to clean the bottom. The boat had been out of the water for maintenance in October but 6 months was clearly too long without further attention.

Now it was time to start heading south towards Northern Spain. We had to first retrace our steps returning to La Rochelle and then Medoc and glad to report performance had been restored.



Approach to Capbreton – best to wait a couple of hours!

After stops at Arcachon and Capbreton both interesting approaches we made it to Hendaye with Spain just a couple of hundred metres away across the river.



Approach to Zumaia

Next port was Zumaia in Spain and another great stopover with easy train access to San Sebastián for a day out; you quickly notice how cheap public transport is in Spain compared to home. The next day guess our surprise when walking out along the breakwater at Zumaia we saw a motorboat approaching which I thought looked like a Sealine SC35 at a distance and it was. The owners when berthed paid us a visit that evening and we swapped experiences of our boats, their boat was based in Arcachon and a similar vintage to Hector. It is a small world.

Then on to our last port of call before flying home the port of Bilbao, en route we had a bit of a fright with a sudden very heavy vibration, slowed down immediately and then slowly increased speed and all seemed well. On arrival at Bilbao and found a very heavy gauge fishing net remnant wrapped around the sterndrives. This event I believe came back to bite us later. Bilbao however was a great place to visit and a short train ride from the Marina to the centre of the city.

So on our return the next stage is to A Coruna for which we have a month set aside and our chance then to visit the Ria's.

After a break in the UK including some visits to the dentist it was time to rejoin Hector in Bilbao. I did have one concern on arrival at Bilbao. I had started to detect a delay on forward drive selection with the port engine, knowing this was an outdrive and not a conventional gearbox I feared the problem being worn cones.

On arrival back at Bilbao checked all the settings on cables and actuators and no errors found. Decided to carry on and see how the situation developed. So we departed Bilbao for Laredo, an enjoyable short passage to be greeted by a large modern marina with only one thing missing, boats.



Laredo Marina – plenty of room!

No trouble finding a berth here it was take your pick. The gear engagement problem was still evident and if anything the delay was increasing. So next stop Santander and arriving on a sunny Sunday afternoon with rowing races, sail races and Brittany Ferries all on the move made for an interesting approach. The next morning I visited the local Volvo Penta agent and presented my I Pad translation from English into Spanish of my understanding of the drive problem. Anyway when it comes to technical translation it appears these marvellous new tools we have are limited. The VP people wondered why I had come to them with my engagement problems surely I should just get married.

But help was at hand and the Commercial Manager Alberto was called for who had excellent English skills and the negotiations began. Starting of course with we are really busy, everyone wants their boat in the water and all their problems fixed immediately which of course in June is fair enough.

Still after a quick lift and some checks it was agreed the cones were likely worn so a plan was put together and a costing.

To cut a long story short after 11 days Hector went back in the water with the cones and all seals replaced on both drives. I was most impressed with the service I received and the mechanic who did the work was knowledgeable and fastidious in his work. It was a challenge getting the work done with the language differences at a busy time of the year but due to the continued efforts of Alberto I think we were very fortunate.

Now time to keep heading west with a few long stages to make the first being to Gijon at 90 nm, this went really well and the scenery was terrific as we went past the Picos De Europa and its snow covered peaks.



Passing the Picos De Europa on our port side

Progress continued and as we headed towards Cedeira we saw a pod of dolphins approaching, stopped the boat and we were surrounded as the dolphins inspected us, this really was something special. Dolphin photos were a disappointment as they did not appear to want to hang around long enough for me fetch the better camera from the cabin, but we enjoyed the moment



Anchored in Cedeira

Spent a night at anchor in the sheltered Ria De Cedeira which made a welcome change from marinas and no anchoring problems. The next passage was to Sada and then after a couple of days on to our final destination for this leg A Coruna, another sighting of dolphins as we turned towards A Coruna making a pleasant conclusion to this stage of the trip. First berth we were allocated in the Marina Real was somewhat rocky every time any vessel passed by but for our extended stay we managed to

negotiate a berth further in the marina, a great improvement. So now to catch up on the jobs at home and our trip continues early August with Vigo and then Portugal in our sights all being well.

After a month at home it was time to return to Hector in A Coruna. A delayed flight from Heathrow had us arrive after midnight and horror, stepped on board and Sheila noticed the port side windscreen was completely shattered with a few small pieces lying beneath it. My initial thoughts were it is all over and we would be going nowhere now. So in despair had some sleep and in the morning started to think what we could do. Marina advised they had no knowledge of the issue and further they had no liability. Anyway the marina did on request advise where I could purchase clear perspex sheet and off we trudged. Purchased a 1 metre square sheet of clear perspex and 6 rolls of tape, taped up the windscreen and then started to knock out a section to be replaced by the perspex. It worked and while not looking pretty I felt we had something which would at least allow us to proceed with caution.

A few days later we set off and all seemed well with reasonable visibility and weatherproof.

So we continued to explore the Spanish Rias in great weather but Lady Luck had not quite finished with us yet. I went to pump out the black water tank en route to Muros and just the sound of air being sucked in. Bottom line the macerator had given up and I suspected more than just an impeller failure. Arrived in Muros a delightful strip down and realised a new macerator was required and onto the internet. The model installed was still available so it was ordered from the UK and in 30 hrs arrived at the marina office. It still amazes me what you can do over the internet these days.



Mark 2 windscreen

So the trip continued and we now had enough confidence in our “new” screen to continue with our objective of Porto in Portugal and a trip up the Douro River. I had purchased at great expense in U.K. a Portuguese courtesy flag and did not want to see it wasted. The run from Baiona in Spain to Porto started off well and at just about the border the fog banks rolled in, the pilot guides do advise that fog is an issue in this area in August and September and can last for days. Just to help this area also has countless pots although to be fair most of them are marked with a stick and flag. So speed reduced and one person on the radar and one looking out we made slow progress without incident to Porto.

Arrived in Porto to a very well run and friendly marina who even delivered fresh bread rolls before breakfast every morning. Now to try and organise our trip up the Douro River where I knew it was necessary to book the locks in advance. I had tried to do research on this at home but not got very far. Signed up to websites, received links, received codes but still could not book locks. Phone calls not answered and e mails not replied to. Off to the marina office and they offered to do it for me and 3 hours later I had my lock bookings starting the next morning and I was ready to go.



River Douro Lock

So next morning off up the Douro River , it was a marvellous trip we travelled 140 km up the Douro , experienced locks which lifted us 35metres in one go and the scenery was spectacular.



Progressing up the Douro

The only real difficulty was finding a berth for the night, the river is geared up for commercial pleasure craft including huge river cruisers but not private boats. One night we begged and pleaded to be allowed to spend the night on a berth associated with a very grand residence, they agreed and were so good to us.



A perfect berth

During our 5 days on the Douro we did not see one other private foreign flag vessel so really did feel quite special. I did have one thought and realised any assistance was a long way away but Hector performed and maybe was just enjoying the warm fresh water.

So time to leave the Douro and back to Porto for a few more days before what was our turnaround point as then we were heading back North to Vigo and preparations for the lift out on to a truck for Hector. We had always considered trucking back rather than back tracking all that way home and with the windscreen issue this tipped the balance on the decision.

It was with some sadness seeing Hector loaded on the Coast 2Coast truck but all good things come to an end and time to planning the winter maintenance plus programme.

PS. Windscreen repair not proving easy seems the original supplier in Italy is not responding so insurance company looking at U.K. company to produce a replacement. It could have been a long wait in A Corona to have it fixed.