

CRUISING 'THE ROCK' AT LEISURE Commodore Simon Currin

(Simon and Sally left Scotland in 2015 aboard Shimshal II, their 48ft (14.6m) cutter, exploring Iceland and Western Greenland before crossing the Labrador Sea to Newfoundland last year. At the end of this season they hope to leave Shimshal to winter in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia.

Follow their travels at <https://voyagesofshimshal.blogspot.pt/p/blog-page.html>.)

June Hiscock, the incredibly helpful Harbour Master in Burgeo, shoots only small moose. She says they taste better and are easier to carry. Having wandered off-piste in the Newfoundland backcountry a few times I can sympathise with the need for easy carriage. Where the moose seem to prosper is amongst the bogs, the bugs and the impenetrable bush. She culls them by canoe and



Simon departing Hare Bay

takes them home for the deep freeze and the bits she doesn't freeze she bottles. On the day of our departure from Newfoundland she had promised a bottle of moose, but when we were about to cast off for Nova Scotia she presented us proudly with some other prime



*Shimshal in Luke's Arm,
Notre Dame Bay*



Burgeo

roasting specimen which, she assured us, would be ‘really tender’. It must have been a small and easily portable moose when it was amongst the bugs and the bogs.

June’s hospitality was by no means the exception. There are more than two hundred Harbour Masters in Newfoundland and, during the months we have been cruising these pristine northern waters, we have probably come across twenty or more. Mostly they are volunteers but some are students earning some dollars during their vacation. All have been kind, courteous and intensely proud of their island, their harbour and their community.

Reg was the dockhand in Burin who gave us freshly-caught cod all filleted and ready for the pan. He handed it down to us from the dock after we had let go the lines, presumably so that nobody would get to know about his Friday gift, as cod can only be legally fished on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

Reg’s boss, Marguerite, is the queen of Harbour Masters. Trained in bookkeeping, she mentors her two hundred colleagues in the hope that the books are kept and the cash balances. She is a lovely, warm, extrovert personality who enthused, above all, about her CCTV. From her swivel chair she tweaked a joystick and zoomed in on both fishing boats and *Shimshal*. That was her entire domain. When we told her we were climbing Cook’s Lookout via the direct route and taking the boardwalk down she almost fainted with dismay – she clearly thought we had gone mad. But we took the steep, direct route that led to yet another of Captain Cook’s many stunning panoramic

* Although most famous for his voyages to the Pacific, it was his meticulous surveys of Newfoundland and the entrance to the Saint Lawrence River during the siege of Quebec in 1759 which brought Lieutenant James Cook to the attention of the British Admiralty. This led to his commission in 1766 as commander of HM Bark *Endeavour* for the first of his three Pacific voyages.

*Cook’s
Lookout
at Burin*



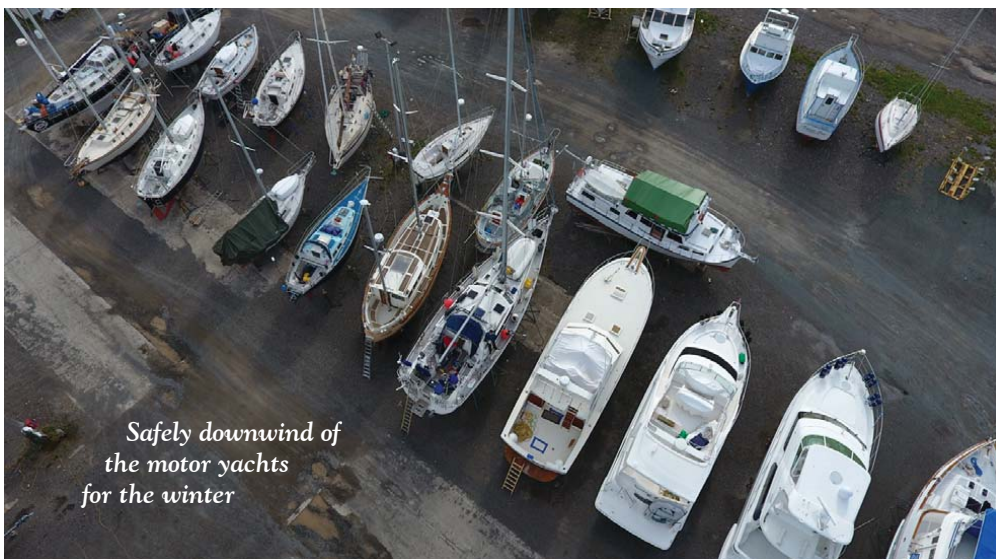
viewpoints*, and we took the boardwalk down, which followed a meandering but equally spectacular route back to town. On the way we met Harrison, the boardwalk builder, who downed tools to chat about boats, boardwalks and his ancestors in England's West Country. Three hundred years on the sounds of Devon, Somerset and Cornwall were all still clear in his accent. A witness to an isolated and untainted community that can trace its roots back to its founders in the 18th century.

Anne took our \$6 token harbour dues in McCallum, but she was 'from away' and still had the German accent to prove it. For many years, a long way from the sea in northern Germany, she had, with her husband, laboured to build a fine 38ft steel sailing boat. They launched it in the Baltic and sailed through the myriad of Danish islands only to find, to Anne's horror, that she didn't like being on the sea and the sickness that can accompany it. No matter, they had set their hearts on a new life and soon her husband was crossing the Atlantic by boat and Anne was flying to the house they had bought, via the internet, in McCallum. That was nine years ago when the population was sixty in this tiny outpost on Newfoundland's wild south coast. Now the numbers have dwindled to thirty but Anne is still there, collecting the dues and day sailing when the seas are calm.

Although *Shimshal*, our home on the sea, was in Newfoundland for just under a year, for much of that she shivered alone through a harsh and windy winter. We had kept a maximum / minimum thermometer inside the boat and it had gone down to -18°C (-0.4°F). *Shimshal* was safely sandwiched between two super-sized motor boats, but one of her less lucky and less protected neighbours had been blown clean off her stands during one of the winter storms that scour the north coast of Newfoundland.

We returned to Lewisporte in June 2019 to continue the Canadian Maritimes cruising adventure that had begun with our Labrador landfall in July 2018. Finding the boat in good shape, we were soon in the water and were amongst the first as spring had come late this year. For the first few weeks of our summer cruise, clockwise around a large part of Newfoundland, each Harbour Master would say, "You are the first boat to visit this year".

In Seldom Come By – yes, it really is called that – the Harbour Master gave us a



*Safely downwind of
the motor yachts
for the winter*



***Launch day at
Lewisporte –
a tight squeeze
in the lift***

guided tour of the fishing museum she curates and then lent us her car for the day to explore the rest of Fogo Island. “But Anne,” we said, “you can’t just give us your Ford Explorer for the day. We need to pay for fuel or something”. “Don’t worry.” she replied, “I’ve got your boat!”.

We drove up to the posh hotel that, at \$2400 a night, caters to the super-rich keen to experience a luxury version of the wilderness. Local families are employed to provide guides to the Island

Seldom Come By and the fishing museum





Boat sheds at Tilting on Fogo Island

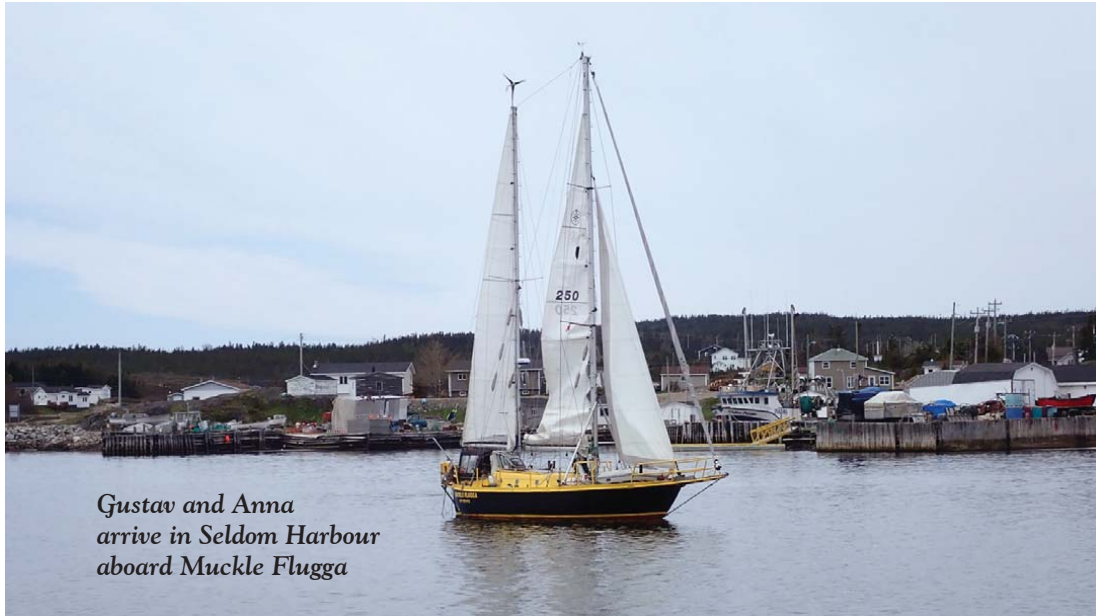
and its fishing history, so the community, the hoteliers and the monied guests all get to benefit from this unique blend of commerce, hospitality and community.

That evening another boat sailed in and tied up opposite us, a hardy Swedish couple pushing speedily north from the Caribbean en route to Greenland, Iceland and an early return to work. From their mast the flying fish burgee fluttered in the breeze. This was the first of the many OCC boats that we encountered in these remote waters, where the icebergs lurk until July and where the fogs and the storms can blight any summer cruise.

All the OCC boats we met had crews with salt running in their veins. Gustav and Anna had taken a sabbatical for their Atlantic circuit, but Molly and Christopher were squeezing their Newfoundland adventure into an academic vacation. For the crew of *Sila*, an early season cruise in Newfoundland was a little light relief after their earlier family cruise which saw them rounding Cape Horn



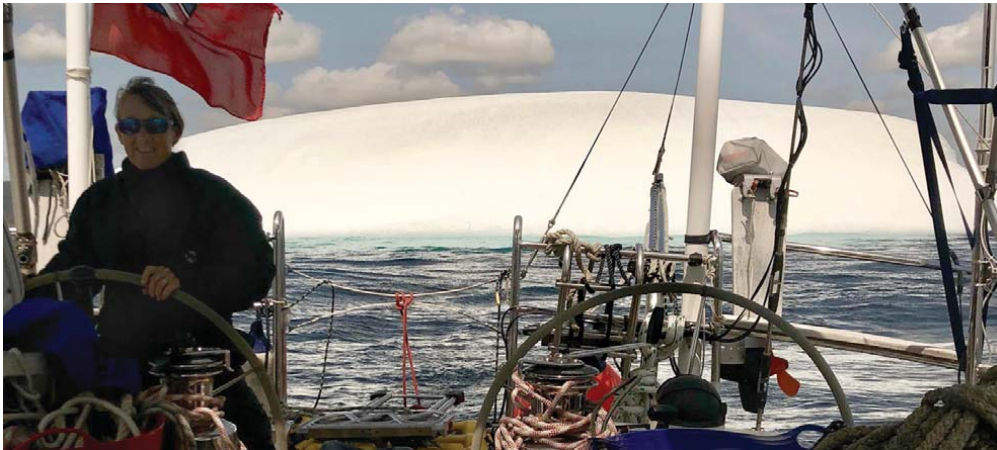
The Fogo Inn



*Gustav and Anna
arrive in Seldom Harbour
aboard Muckle Flugga*

after cruising Patagonia. From there they went, via the Falklands, to South Georgia for a month before the very long passage from the Southern Ocean to Ireland – no wonder the kids had deserted them this year in favour of summer camp in Vermont!

Mostly it was day sailing, and we used the excuse of icebergs to make sure we were tied up in a harbour or swinging at anchor by dusk. We didn't see an iceberg after Cape Freels, but we enjoyed the pattern so much that we kept it up. Every day a different port, often a walk ashore and then unbroken sleep. Perfect.



Through June there were still plenty of iceberg around

Ted Laurentius, our Port Officer in St John's, said he'd never seen so many OCC boats – he'd counted four in one weekend, which is more than he gets most years. As ever, Ted and Karen were the perfect hosts and we all turned up at Tess and Al's house

Entering French waters on the approach to St Pierre

for an impromptu get-together. The others brought wine and chocolates whereas we brought our dirty laundry, which spun away as we enjoyed the fine food and inspiring company.

The weather didn't turn out quite as expected, but we are definitely not complaining about that. June and July are noted for their fogs but we saw few. Instead we had warm, sunny days with light but mostly contrary winds. A lot of diesel was burned. When the fog did come it added that little spice to the adventure. The day we left St Pierre the fog was so thick that the harbour seemed like a maze of buoys, boats and fog horns. I blew our fog horn every two minutes but, by the time we were out of French



waters and safely back in Canadian territory, summer was restored with flat seas, spouting fin whales and exuberant, leaping dolphins.

When the wind did blow we sat it out in harbour. Conveniently, that generally happened in the ports where there was much to do. In St John's the boat was grit-blasted by a minor gale whilst we took tea in The Rooms gazing down at the busy harbour antics. In St Pierre we succumbed to the French cafés, croissants and restaurants and in Burgeo we pedalled our bikes to windward to stroll on beaches in the Sandbanks Provincial Park, wild, remote and sparkling in the summer sunshine.

It was in Burgeo that *Shimshal* was at last reunited with *Alchemy*. We had last shared an anchorage with fellow OCC members Dick and Ginger two years previously

Entering St Pierre



Simon and Sally, with Ginger and Dick from Alchemy



Alchemy arriving in Burgeo



in Greenland. This summer, cruising in opposite directions, our paths crossed again and a supper of Reg's fish was fried up to celebrate.

The first person we met in François (pronounced 'Franzway') was the Harbour Master when we pulled in at the yellow-painted Government Dock ahead of where the daily ferry berths. He sent us to the other Government Dock as the ferry would, he said, most likely "crash into us as it overhangs its own berth". We didn't take much persuading and headed over to the floating dock, also painted yellow. Soon after our arrival George sauntered down to warn us that the paint was still wet and to mind our clothing. He was a charming guy, restoring a dory in readiness for



François (pronounced Franzway)

next year's 'Come Home', when those who have left the Outports to seek fame and fortune return to their town of birth to celebrate, to drink and to feast.

When we finally found the track leading up from the lake above town to Friars Rock, we discovered that George had been hard at work with his left-over Government Dock yellow paint. Every rock and every tree stump along the steep ascent had been daubed with his favourite colour. The narrow path twisted its way up the mountainside,

The waterfront at François



A plague of black fly

allowing us to tread where others had trodden before – a far cry from the previous hour or two that we had spent thigh deep in brush, boulder and bog trying to force our own route up to another peak.



Hot work on a summer day with too many clothes on in order to keep the swarms of black fly at bay. George's 'join the dots and yellow' was a delight in comparison.

We didn't cruise all of Newfoundland by boat, but we did the rest by road.

François orchid and pitcher plant





On the summit of Gros Morne

When here in the autumn to fill *Shimshal's* plumbing with antifreeze we had hired a car and visited the parts we knew we would never have time to reach by sea. Standing on the summit of Gros Morne in autumnal, slanting light, and wandering through the Norse remains at L'Anse aux Meadows, are images that will endure for ever. During that visit we narrowly avoided being 'screeched in' – a curious invention that enables those 'from away' to become honorary Newfoundlanders. On the downside you have to drink enormous amounts of 'screech' and kiss a cod!

This story is really about the people of Newfoundland, the hardy cruisers who sail there and the unbelievable friendliness of all folk that live on 'the Rock' – none more so than in Lewisporte where, for almost a year, we were welcomed with open arms. They took us into their community and loaned us their cars, whilst all the time encouraging us to cruise slowly and enjoy their piece of paradise. Thank you Peter Watkins for that invaluable advice. I hope many more OCC boats will come your way and linger so that they can come to know your beautiful island.



In fancy I listened – in fancy could hear
The thrum of the shrouds and the creak of the gear,
The patter of reef points on the mainsail a-quiver,
The bow-wave that breaks with a gurgle like laughter
And the cry of the seabirds following after,
Over oceans of wonder, by headlands of gleam
To the harbours of fancy on the wind of a dream.

Anon

With thanks to Victor Clarke, who quoted these lines
on the title page of his book *On the Wind of a Dream*