

# Practical tips for sailing round Britain

Sailing around the British Isles is a uniquely rewarding challenge. Four skippers share their advice

## Plan and plan again

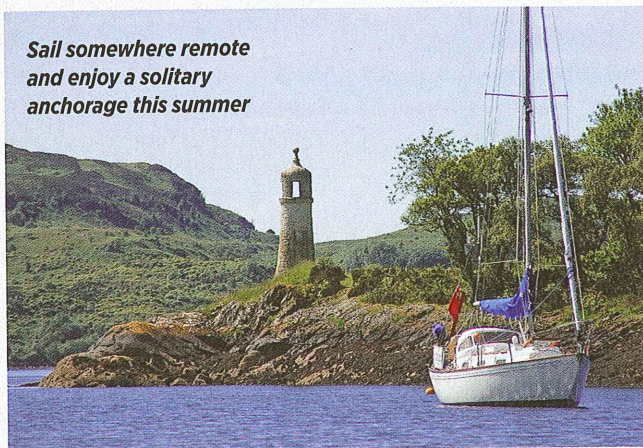
**John MacMullen:** 'Planning is all but beware of "The Plan". The only certainty in cruising is the uncertainty. Always have at least one fallback plan in mind and never be too inflexible to change should circumstances dictate. Remember too the old adage, 'never miss a fair wind' and be prepared to adjust your schedule accordingly.'

## How far will you go?

**Alastair Buchan:** 'When sailing round Britain, after allowing for a few days sheltering from bad weather, you can expect a minimum of four to six weeks at sea. Multiply half your vessel's maximum speed by 24 to get a fair indication of how far you can sail in a full 24-hour period.'

## Sailing to a schedule

**Ken Endean:** 'Before you go, draw up a schedule including places you want to visit, areas to explore, and the less-exciting necessities of crew changes or places to leave the boat. No matter how well you plan, though, you will always be behind schedule. Getting all the way round the coast can feel like a race against the clock. I would recommend three months for the trip.'



*Sail somewhere remote and enjoy a solitary anchorage this summer*

PHOTO: ANN MUGGRAVEN/M

## Sail clockwise

**John MacMullen:** 'Having been south coast-based, my preference is for a clockwise route, probably due to life-long experience of prevailing south-westerlies and a desire to get the 'westing' over with and then being able to ease the sheets. The deciding factor, however, is probably the extended forecast before departure.'

## Sail anti-clockwise

**Ken Endean:** Starting from the south coast, I favour an anticlockwise route. The

## Don't be daunted

**John MacMullen:** 'Undertaking a long trip may seem daunting. It is to us all, but it's only one day at a time and providing you factor in enough time then you can relax. Too tight a timetable is a recipe for stress, increasing your chance of making poor decisions and leading to bad experiences.'

## Cutting through canals

**Alastair Buchan:** 'Allow three days for transiting the Caledonian Canal and a day each for the Crinan and the Forth & Clyde canals. The latter can be a useful shortcut but be aware of the height limit of 3m and a depth of 1.8m. The canal's start is a long sail up the Clyde before you discover this.'

prevailing south-westerlies in the UK will give you a good lee along east- and north-facing coasts. Coming down the west coast, there is a strong chance you will get a wind veer to the north-west after each low pressure system passes to help you on your way. The sea breeze, if it's warm enough, should also assist as it tends to veer during the day.

## Coping with exposed areas

**Ken Endean:** 'Parts of the UK coastline are very exposed, particularly the East Coast, north Cornwall, Cardigan Bay and the west coast of Ireland. North-bound from Lowestoft, for example, you have a long way to go until the next safe haven. Other areas also have limited all-tide harbours, so while the distances are not vast, they are long enough to be challenging if you have limited crew.'

## OUR EXPERTS

### Ken Endean



Sailing book author Ken has been around Britain twice, once via Cape Wrath and once via the Caledonian Canal. He has also completed a number of extended cruises around our coast without them being circumnavigations.

### John MacMullen



John has sailed most of the UK coast a number of times over 40 or more years and knows the remoter parts of the coast better than many know their home waters.

### Alastair Buchan



The first time Alastair sailed around Britain was to avoid work. Thereafter, having sailed to Land's End and faced with turning left or right, he chose to complete two more circuits. He has made the trip both with crew and solo.

### Chris Beeson



Having cruised coastally in many places, Chris crewed in the 2006 Round Britain and Ireland Race as part of a crew of 10 aboard Tom Hayhoe's Prima 38, *Mostly Harmless*.

## Self-sufficiency is key

**John MacMullen:** 'Self-sufficiency is the watchword so your yacht should be sound and fit for purpose. A thorough shake-down cruise is a good idea. Longer passages make much greater demands than daysailing and a second competent watchkeeper aboard is a bonus.'

## Sail when it suits

**Ken Endean:** 'Leave enough time in your plan to sail when conditions are suitable, as it'll make the trip so much easier and more pleasant. Don't forget, however, that good weather often has no wind in it. If you wait for sunshine you'll end up



*Rounding Muckle Flugga, the British Isles' most northerly point, gives a real sense of achievement*

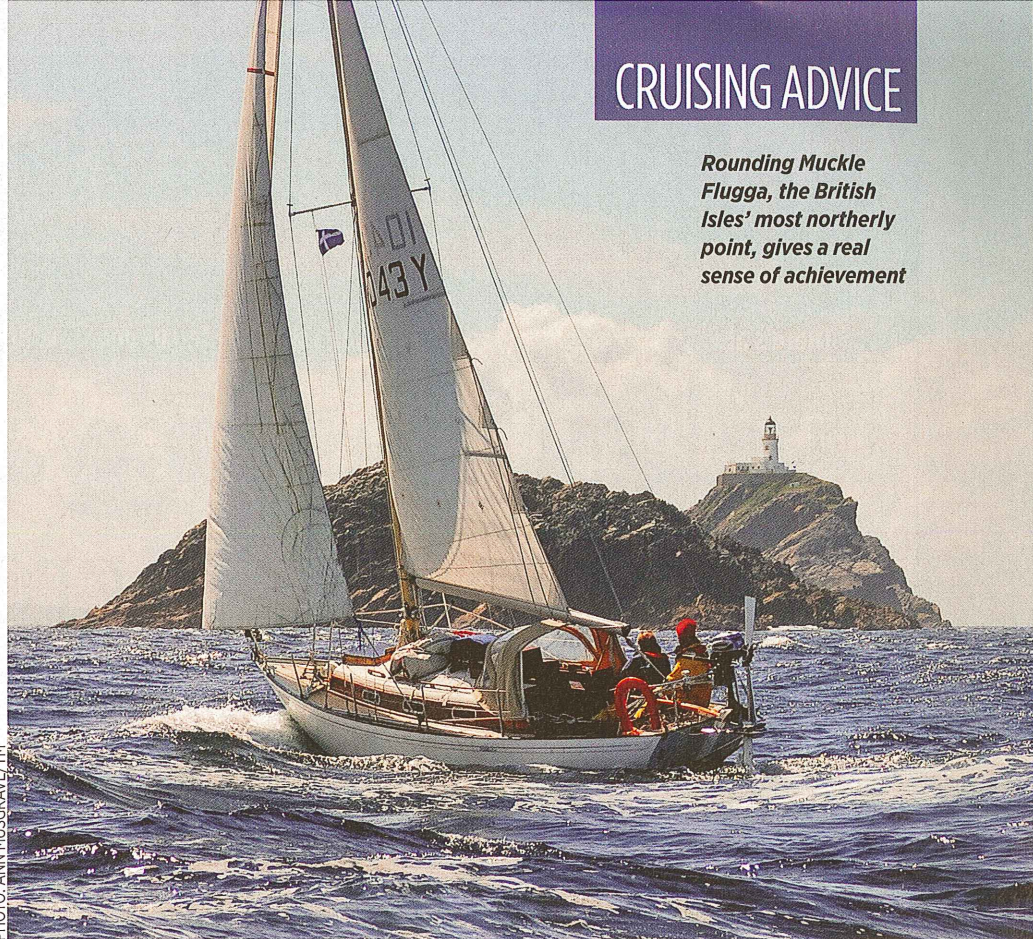


PHOTO: ANN MUSGRAVE/YYM

motoring everywhere, so it's better to take the wind if it's in the right direction, even if the conditions are less than ideal.'

### Set your limits

**Alastair Buchan:** 'Before you start out, lay down the weather conditions, actual or forecast, in which you are not prepared to leave harbour. Stick to them en route; you laid them down for good reasons.'

### Beware the hazards

**John MacMullen:** 'Be guided by the pilot book and passage instructions. Whilst a wide berth off a headland is often recommended, inshore passages may be possible when conditions are right and can save you miles. Check the chart carefully and get in really close if that's your option. Tidal races deserve respect, especially when there's wind against tide. Make sure you get the timing right! Where you encounter Traffic Separation Schemes, use the Inshore Traffic Zone where possible and if crossing, do so on a 90° heading to the traffic flow.'

### Break it up

**Alastair Buchan:** 'If work, crew, or family commitments require breaking the voyage then leave your boat in a port with good shelter, berthing, security and transport links. Avoid leaving your dinghy and outboard motor unattended for any length of time and always allow for tide when parking your dinghy, or when you return it may be far inland, or worse, far out to sea. You could also share the cruise with friends, if you don't have time for it all.'

### What to take

**Ken Edean:** 'Marinas can be few and far between, and there is much pleasure to be had in an isolated anchorage, so make sure you have an anchor you trust. A decent tender will also increase your enjoyment of remoter places. A fender board will help protect your topsides when you moor against a rough quay wall or pilings, and you'll also need long lines for proper springs. Being able to take the ground is an advantage for small harbours. Carry

spare fuel cans, and top up whenever you get chance. Make sure you have enough battery-charging capacity to cope away from shore power.'

### Take provisioning seriously

**Alastair Buchan:** 'To enjoy the more remote anchorages without fear of starvation, always carry about a week's water and rations aboard.'

### Plan to come back

**Ken Edean:** As you travel around the coast, you will realise that you are barely scratching the surface, and that there are many places you want to come back to and explore more thoroughly. Make a note of them and you'll have a cruising destination for the following year.

### Unplanned memories

**John MacMullen:** You'll have formed your own ideas about what you don't want to

miss, but it's often the unplanned places that leave the best memories. Talk to people you meet along the way; you'll occasionally be recommended a real gem.'

### Take the fast lane

**Chris Beeson:** 'My circumnavigation took 13.5 days non-stop. Frustratingly, 12 of these were upwind. We didn't explore anchorages, but I vividly remember much of it. We hit a huge sunfish with our rudder off the Isles of Scilly. While bringing a sail below in lively weather off Ireland we tipped water all over the chart table, killing Bob the navigator's laptop. Benbecula's beaches looked stunning as we tacked out past St Kilda. We saw Aurora Borealis on the way north to round Muckle Flugga, and the last sunset as we sailed west past Dungeness was epic. The most impressive sight? Gas flares of oil rigs at night lighting up thick, low cloud in the North Sea, like cities of gold.' ▲

## Route options around Britain

Distances in Nautical Miles



UK via the Forth and Clyde Canal - 1600



UK and Ireland via the Forth & Clyde Canal - 1700



UK via the Caledonian Canal - 1900



UK via Cape Wrath - 2200



UK and Ireland via Cape Wrath - 2600

CHARTS: MAXINE HEATH