

Baltic Sea Cruise

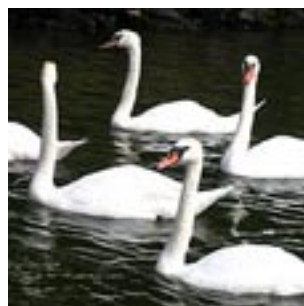
Part 2: Stralsund & Rugen

By Peter Tait

By local canal to Wilhelmshaven, out into the North Sea, up the busy Elbe, through the Kiel Canal into the Baltic! The Baltic Sea is a fascinating region to visit, with no tide rise and fall, a long seafaring history, medieval ex-communist coastal ports, a multitude of local boats and naked swimming the norm..

The new crew consisted of Jochen's wife Arnhilde, his wife and daughters Christine and Ilse. Ilse who was largely pregnant had her 1 year old Oscar on board, husband Mark also. Mark is an Australian cray fisherman so this was new water for him too. This area of shallow waterways and a lot of low-lying sandy islands was familiar to the family as they had enjoyed several summer cruises here previously.

This part of Germany was under communist control after WW2 and is still a long way from being 'Westernised'. With no modernisation through that time the small sea-side towns still have cobbled streets and old and derelict waterfront warehouses. Nowadays restoration rather than modernisation is retaining the old style nicely but the overall feel of 'dated and faded' will take some overcoming.



Top left, then clockwise..

- 1. Ralswiek Castle and some of the 5000 at the outdoor theatre. The show included sailing ships and canonfire.*
- 2. Summer cafes created a unique medieval street vibe.*
- 3. The big, fat migratory Rugen swans in the news as part of the 2006 birdflu drama*
- 4. Horse-drawn transport only in the small and once classy island resort of Kloster*



An early chart of the region showing Stralsund, Zingst National Park and the Island of Rugen. The Polish border is just to the east.

Old Hanseatic town of Stralsund

Founded in the 13th century Stralsund has had a turbulent past. It's heyday was as a prosperous member of the Hanseatic League, a group of early trading towns when over 300 ships flew the Stralsund flag. But a massive red brick city wall, parts of which are currently being restored, and moat didn't stop invasions by the Danes, the Swedes, the Prussians, then WW2 and the Russians (few of the locals speak English but have good Russian!). Surprisingly what remains still seems like an old medieval town and it's a friendly place to visit! The population today is about 60,000 but you couldn't say it's prosperous - perhaps the young and talented have moved south for better opportunity and a warmer climate.

Still, it's an interesting town to visit by boat. The waterfront, complete with a resident square rigger, the famous 'Gorch Fock I' (see heading photo) has a very old air about it. Parts of the old moat, olde worlde brick waterfront buildings and high lighting towers to cope with the long dark winters add to the rather eiry feeling that you've travelled back in time a 100 years. And that's in the summer, I'd like to see it in the winter but will settle for the webcam view!



Top bakeries everywhere



Old waterfront buildings



Tied up alongside the Police Patrol Boat!

The Lost Wallet!

Something you don't need as a traveller is a lost wallet. I managed to lose mine when it slipped the wrong side of a trouser pocket one wet day walking about town. But it was a victory for the optimist - Mark the Aussie and I retraced our steps right across town and struck gold when Mark asked the Information man at the Maritime Museum shouted "Ya!" and passed it over with a beaming smile!



Mid-summer twilight 11pm but note the warm clothing!

Fuel filter and FREE spectacles thrown in!

Ever since the dirty fuel filter problems at Helgoland we had been keeping an eye out for a new filter. The diesel, a near new Nanni Kubota was going OK now but a new filter was still needed. This resulted in an interesting walk to all the local boat-bit shops at every port, some very old, some new, mostly friendly and with all sorts of nautical gear for sale. At Stralsund, surprise! surprise! the local agent had one and that wasn't all, when Jochen couldn't read the label without his glasses the shopkeeper said "Try these, someone left them behind!" They worked even better than his own so he was given them to keep. Our luck had changed - fuel filter at last and free glasses too!

A three day Medieval Fair took place while we were there. The town was filled with stalls of all types: food, beer, clothes, art, hot tubs and public rub-downs by topless masseuses. Later live music took over the town and raged until dawn. But not us, we had vacated our handy berth alongside the Police Patrol Boat at the required time and moved over to the village of Alte Fahre. Aarh - nice and peaceful!

The Island of Rügen

The local guide book says, *“Stirringwould be the best way to describe the particular beauty of Germany’s largest island, directly at the entrance to the Hanseatic Town of Stralsund. Magnificent forests alternate with flowering meadows and fields, lively stretches of sandy beach and still bays, softly-rolling hills and the breathtaking chalk cliffs at the “Königsstuhl” (king’s seat). That so many find Rügen to be a first-class holiday location is no wonder, given the number of discoveries to be made, for instance the sophistication of the coastal resort of Binz, the fairytale quality of the nearby hunting lodge of Granitz, the wild romance of the northern tip of Cape Arkona, the steam-engine, narrow-gauge railway known to the locals as “Racing Roland”, the large-scale architecture in Prora and, of course, the great open-air stage of Ralswiek, the setting for the famous Störtebeker Festival. You simply have to experience Rügen for yourself!”*

Unlike the writer above we arrived by sea and were immediately struck by the unusual very shallow water with man-made channels criss-crossing everywhere. These channels were barely wide enough for two boats to pass and the bouyage, something to behold!



Evening sail and coastal walk near Kloster.



Snug mooring place at Alte Fahre

Whoops - run aground!

It was a refreshing sail most of the way from Stralsund to Kloster. About three hours worth but we couldn't avoid some motoring because some of the channels were very narrow with quite heavy two-way traffic and even 'cross roads' - who had right-of-way there?

The large ferries which ply the region are a menace to keel boats. We slightly over-reacted at one passing and promptly ran aground in soft mud. Even with two stripped off crew members pushing we couldn't get off but a local tow-boat appeared from nowhere, probably sent by the ferry company and soon had us off.



Mostly bicycles today at the old hotel at Kloster.



Wild cherry picking and cafe sign near Kloster

Once 'very fashionable' Kloster

Still pretty and a pleasant place to visit, Kloster would have been a very fashionable seaside resort in earlier times. Berlin is not far away to the south and surely this would have been a playground for the rich and famous. The old hotel in the photo above was still fairly grand with an interesting interior and formal service but the gay-old-times were in the past. I pondered the possibility that Hitler had ever spent romantic weekends here with the lovely Eva Braun. Maybe?

Old boats and Lighthouse Walking

Kloster is situated on the sheltered side of Hiddensee an outer island of the region. To the north it is 'next stop Sweden' so the outer beach is a surf beach and the lighthouse on the point a large and important one. Lighthouse walking was always on the agenda so off we went, across the island, along the clifftops and up to another spectacular lighthouse. These were significant buildings, an indication of the importance of sea transport in this region over the years. The walking paths paved with poorly made concrete slabs had been constructed during the Communist years probably as a recreational pursuit for Party Members enjoying a few days at the old hotel.



Lighthouse walks and the old fishing boat.



Feeding swans from the 'Christina'

The restored fishing boat 'Christina' belonged to Jorck a friend of Jochen's who was enjoying a few days away with his family. The clinker hull had been a sailing fishing boat and was now looking great as a family cruiser. The old chart which appears on page one of this article is from 'Christina's bulkhead. The large family managed to squeeze in to the small accommodation space. The boat close up was a budget job but had been cleverly done and from a distance was lovely like an oil painting.

Since the reunification of the two Germanies many West German families have 'adopted' families from the East, helping them back on their feet with hand-me-downs and anything that was no longer needed, appliances, cars and even financial help. Jorck who had grown up in this area had benefited in this way and was extremely grateful. The family were embarrassed at having no English - the Communists had made everyone learn Russian!



Holiday houses and walking streets at Kloster



Outdoor theatre with big cast at Ralswiek

The Outdoor Stortebeker Festival

Each year at Ralswiek, a small town on the Eastern side of Rugen put on a major outdoor theatrical production through the summer months. Busloads of visitors poured in from all parts of the north so it was a regular and popular event.

The venue out under the stars seated 4000 and we went along. The Stortebeker story is one of olden-time heroics against the English with gunfire and invasions, love and romance, sea battles with real ships and even a low flying eagle buzzing the crowd. Outside at night in these parts in August is very cold but that aside it was a great show.

Time to head home

The original idea had been for a charterer to take over the boat at Stralsund and cruise it home but these plans had fallen through. It was decided that Jochen, Mark and Peter would do the trip. Three captains, it would be a good few days and maybe we would call in at Helgoland on the way.

The first leg to dasser Ort was into a strong wind but with a good diesel and Protection from the elements we simply bashed our way to the snug little anchorage and even had time for a lighthouse walk!

Leg two missed out Warnemunde and we spent the night at the marina under the 'bow bridge' at Fehman Island and it was more motoring with light airs to Kiel the next day.

Interestingly we had noticed a tidal flow near the Fehman Gap. This entire area effectively has no tide rise and fall so that was strange. After much discussion we decided it was the effect of high atmospheric pressure at the east end of the Baltic and low where we were causing a slight tide to run our way.

The next night we tied up at the entrance to the Kiel Kanal and next morning with a 'Viking Ship' full of school children in tow we started the 99 kilometer haul through the canal. Overnighting at a canalside stopping place we caught the tide in the Elbe and sped out into the North Sea. A four knot tide amongst busy shipping lanes kept the navigators busy. Later we were concerned to see a summer fog descending and soon heard fog horns booming! Fortunately the larger ships didn't follow our route and we arrived at the entrance to the Weser in time to catch the flood tide up to Wilhelmshaven, the stop at Helgoland put on hold for next time.

When the refinery looms out of the haze you know you're nearly there. The tide made for a big time gain and we headed into the marina at the local yacht club, 700 miles completed!

Wanting to go there?

All those miles and we didn't see any cruising boats flying English flags but that's not surprising. Getting to the Elbe is a nasty piece of water even in calm weather so you wouldn't want to be out there in a blow. The inland canals stop at Wilhelmshaven so that small sea journey deters most sailors from heading further north.

Charter boats are available at Stralsund, roomy launches which would be ideal for the Rugen area and could also travel the canal and river systems inland to Berlin and beyond. Canal cruising in these neglected parts of Europe and old Communist countries areas is becoming more accessible as language barriers are removed and Europe expands. The sights are eye-popping and can be compared with living history. Life's been tough for the locals!

Many thanks to Jochen and the 'Orokawa' for a safe voyage and memorable adventure. Thanks also to the various crewmates for continuous good company and to Arnhild for a top job in the galley.



4 knot tides and "There's the refinery - we're home!"



Tied up again at the yacht club. Mark, time for a beer!

