

Jonathan and Pippin in the recording studio set up in the forecabin of Bear Poles

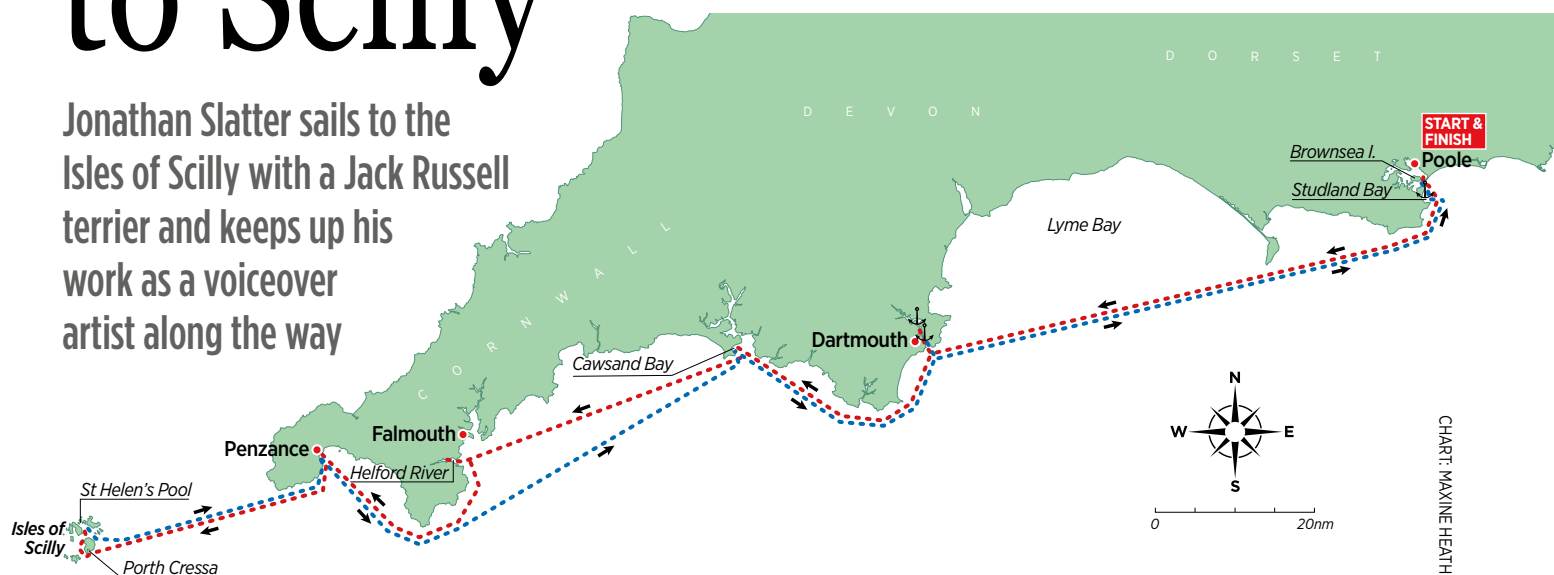


Bear Poles anchored to the far right in St Helen's Pool in Old Grimsby harbour, an easy dinghy ride from Tresco



One man and his dog sail to Scilly

Jonathan Slatter sails to the Isles of Scilly with a Jack Russell terrier and keeps up his work as a voiceover artist along the way



If I could take my Jack Russell, Pippin, and find a way to keep up my work recording voiceovers, I should be able to sail to Scilly. That was the plan but for many years, for one reason or another, it hadn't happened. Last summer I was determined to make it, finally, to this intriguing archipelago off the toe of Cornwall.

My job involves recording music and voiceovers for TV and radio ads, so I took a portable recording rig and set up a little recording studio and voice booth in the forecabin. This way, in a quiet, calm anchorage I could record any urgent

voiceovers or jingles, send them off using a half-decent 3G mobile signal, and avoid losing any really important work or feeling as though we had to rush back.

I was going to be sailing singlehanded, so the autopilot was a particular concern. My drive unit clutch has the habit of disengaging itself at will, usually when I'm up at the mast reefing. I experimented with a bungee to keep the clutch engaged. Without an autopilot, a long day sailing singlehanded can be tricky on *Bear Poles*, my Moody 336, as I find it difficult to balance the helm, which means I can't take a break from the wheel.

Leaving Poole, I decided to get across Lyme Bay on the first day. We had light winds on the nose so the motor was on, but with the Autohelm working like a dream I was able to settle Pippin into life at sea (although she spurned the piece of artificial grass I had bought her), make tea and sandwiches, clean the boat and generally feel relaxed about the trip. A good autopilot is like an extra crewman who is happy to helm perfectly for hours and hours. After a 15-hour passage we anchored up the Dart, just below the Anchor Stone at Dittisham, rowed ashore and revived our energy in the lovely Ferry Boat Inn.

As we sailed into Dartmouth the previous evening, I had

picked up an email from a client who needed a voiceover urgently. I had planned to do it that evening but after the long sail, I wasn't in the mood for selling cars on the radio. So the morning started very early with the usual dog walk ashore first, then 15 minutes in the forecabin studio recording the radio ad, before sending it off to the radio station via my mobile phone. The break of day was absolutely still and quiet at anchor, so apart from the odd seagull squawk there were no intrusive sounds to deal with and recording was easy.

I hauled up the anchor, filled up with diesel at one of the smartest fuel barges I have ever come across, motored out past Dartmouth castle, hoisted the main

and set a course to clear Start Point. We motorsailed for a couple of hours out into a gloomy, lumpy Start Bay then went about, killed the engine and sailed into the sun with a good breeze towards Cawsand Bay, about three miles SSW of Plymouth. It's another favourite anchorage with good holding, good Cornish ale, and it's free. Arriving at 1700 left me time to swim, give Pippin a good walk and make some decent food on board.

We awoke to a beautiful morning. At times like these that you do wonder why you have to leave such a beautiful anchorage so soon. It would be very tempting to stay, swim, walk and generally relax, but with Scilly on the brain we motored out of the bay, around Penlee Point and set a course for the Helford River.

Pippin had started out quite happy to sit with me, tied on in the cockpit, but had steadily developed a fear of the high-pitched beeps emitted by the autopilot control whenever I engaged it or changed course. By now, I would only have to move my hand towards the control unit and she would become agitated and try and escape down the companionway steps whilst still tied on. I had to choose between altering course and rescuing the dog, now suspended by her lifejacket halfway into the

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We sailed into Penzance across Mounts Bay in glorious weather

Our first port of call in Scilly was the beautiful bay of Porth Cressa on St Mary's



saloon. Under sail, she was often happier down below where she could still see me in the cockpit, and would reappear once she smelled land.

By 1600 we were entering the beautiful Helford, looking for a convenient anchorage near the Ferry Boat Inn, as my parents were driving over from Penzance to come aboard for dinner. We anchored just off Trebah Gardens beach with amazing views all round. So far we had had three nights at anchor, all free.

We started the day with a dinghy hop to the lovely Trebah beach (private, I later discovered) for Pippin's constitutional and read about how the beach was used on D-Day as an embarkation point for US Infantry troops.

As a novice skipper in Dorset, I sailed around St Alban's headland for the first time in flat, calm water, wondering what all the fuss was about, only to discover on my return that overfalls in full flight can be a very frightening, dangerous experience. With too much sail up, I had gone straight into a frenzy of short, steep waves that had my partner saying, 'I hope the waves will be kind to us...' while I tried to look unconcerned. Ever since

Dinghy stop on Tean Island, with Bear Poles anchored in distance



There was good shelter in St Helen's Pool behind Round island

then, and a partner down, I have had a healthy respect of headlands, so despite the dead-calm conditions that morning, we motored out of the Helford River, cleared the Manacles cardinal and set an unnecessarily wide course around the Lizard, escorted by two dolphins. I was excited to finally pick out our destination in the distance with the binoculars.

The choice for a berth in Mount's Bay is either Penzance wet dock or the fishing port of Newlyn. I chose the wet dock, so I could leave the boat there unattended for a few days to go and stay with my parents.

Penzance wet dock is like a lot of things in the town; a little time-warped and perhaps a bit rough around the edges. I liked its charm and character, though,

and the staff were happy to help and offer advice. We were simply rafted up against the harbour wall, sharing the dock with working fishing boats and *Gry Maritha*, the supply ship for the Isles of Scilly.

After a few days ashore, Pippin and I were back getting *Bear Poles* ready to sail. For years I have enviously watched yachts making their way out towards Scilly; to finally be doing it myself was exciting and unnerving. We motored out with the mainsail up and worked our way along the coast. Approaching the Runnel Stone cardinal south of Gwenapp Head, the sea state changed dramatically. As the coast turned northwards towards Land's End and we pushed on out to the west, we were soon being buffeted by nasty, steep seas, leaving me to wonder if it was fair to make Pippin endure this for six hours.

Decisions, decisions. Sometimes the best thing to do is nothing, to wait and see. I was fairly confident that the sea state would ease as we moved away from the headland. To my relief, before long the waves eased and in half an hour the engine was off, the genoa unfurled and we could set a course for Scilly. With the sun now out, the dog more relaxed

and the faithful autopilot doing all the work I was able to attend to my nautical duties: plot my position, write up the log and make a cup of tea.

Without a chartplotter on board, I used the Navionics and Boatie apps on my iPhone for passage-planning and navigation, referring occasionally to paper charts and almanac.

Despite being fairly certain we were on course, it was still a relief to spot the various islands appearing in the binoculars – a confusing view until you identify the main landmass of St Mary's. I steered for St Mary's Sound rather than Crow Sound, as I was hoping to find a mooring in Porth Cressa. Once I had identified the Spanish Ledge easterly

St Mary's Harbour is often full of visiting yachts but there is lots to explore ashore



cardinal at the entrance to the sound, we dropped the sails, motored into Porth Cressa and picked up one of the buoys.

Being open to the south, there was a fair amount of swell for much of the time here but with ready supplies of water, fuel, and a very helpful moorings officer with local knowledge bringing daily weather reports, it was a good place to start. We both wanted to be somewhere more remote, though, anchored away from the crowds.

With that in mind I took a deep breath and headed for St Helen's Pool, north-east of Treco. My father's persistent reminders – 'There are an awful lot of rocks in Scilly, you know' – had sown a few seeds of doubt as to whether I could get the boat across all the 'green patches' on the chart, but with plenty of tide and a bit more flood to come, a very useful back bearing and the trusty Navionics app, we slowly made our way up the east side of Treco, turning to starboard before Old Grimsby harbour and across into the wonderful anchorage of St Helen's Pool. Now this was more like it – stunning scenery everywhere, the waves of the Atlantic in the distance and masses of space. And like all the best things in life,

'With the sun out, the dog relaxed and the faithful autopilot was doing all the work'

free. To Pippin's delight the uninhabited islands of Tean and St Helen's stood just a short dinghy ride away.

St Helen's Pool was home for quite a few days and when the wind eased and the water was still I was able to record some TV and radio ads, as well as some telephone hold recordings – yes, I'm one of those annoying people who say 'calls may be recorded for training and quality purposes'. I was not expecting any kind of mobile phone coverage in such a remote place but in fact we had a strong 3G signal, which made working simple.

There's an amazing view from the summit of St Helen's and down on the south side you'll find the remains of the isolation hospital from the days when the island was a quarantine station. We also

explored Tean several times, cleared some rubbish off the beach and took it to the recycling bins at Treco.

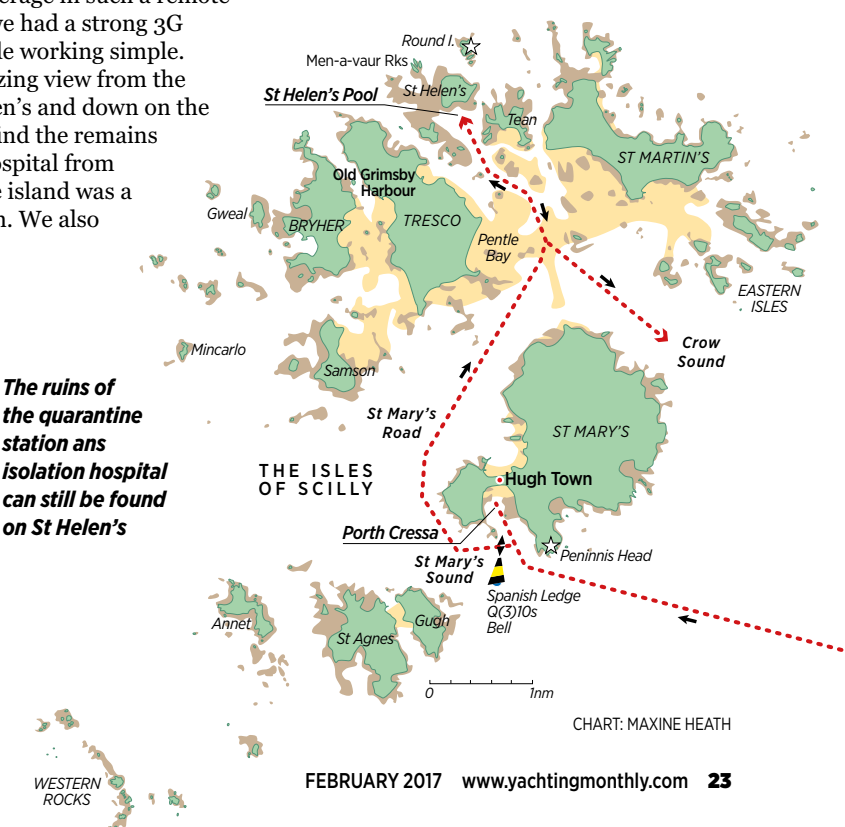
Tresco might be famous for its gardens, beaches and views, but it's also home to the very impressive Island Store and Deli. I wondered whether we would ever need to leave, especially when some good friends arrived early one morning from Falmouth and anchored next to us. It was a fitting end to our adventure.

We left St Helen's Pool using the Men-a-vaur rocks as a back bearing and slowly made our way down to Crow Sound, then out to sea for a slow run back to Penzance.

After a couple more days with my parents it was time to get *Bear Poles* back to Poole. We set off on a lovely sunny morning, expecting a fairly easy trip back round to the Helford. My loyal



The ruins of the quarantine station and isolation hospital can still be found on St Helen's



**New Grimsby sound seen
from the hills of Tresco**



'I didn't have to wait long for things to start going wrong. At 0900 the autopilot stopped working'

crew and most excellent helm, however, had other ideas. As soon as I had raised the mainsail and turned the boat towards the Lizard there was a strange grinding noise from the autopilot. The motor was turning but the wheel wasn't moving. This is when you need another pair of hands to helm while you scratch your head and get your toolkit. I thought and hoped it might be the drive unit belt, which would be easy to replace out here in Mount's Bay, but annoyingly the belt was fine.

I didn't fancy sailing without an autopilot, so headed back to Penzance. It turned out that the gearbox had destroyed

itself and was beyond repair. Repairs and spares were not readily available for the old Autohelm drive unit and a new one would cost £500. The Moody Owners Association came to my rescue and a very kind chap in Scotland sent me a whole box of drive unit spares including gearboxes and motors by next-day delivery.

All was well as we made our way past the Lizard, turned to port and started a thrilling broad-reach ride towards Cawsand Bay. It seemed too good to be true... and it was.

According to my log, the autopilot packed up again at 1244. This time the clutch lever just broke away from the unit so I was back on the wheel. We arrived in Plymouth in the early evening, just in time to walk the dog, grab a bite to eat, strip the autopilot down again and try out some more spares.

I helmed all the way to Dartmouth the next day after my dodgy soldering of a new motor failed miserably, almost as soon as we had set off. I spent the evening anchored in Dartmouth opposite Kingswear, trying to improve the soldering, but it was at best a botched affair. Still, it seemed to operate and turn the wheel when I tried it at anchor.

I left a becalmed Dartmouth at 0645, motored out past the castle, set a course to clear Portland Bill by about five miles and very gently engaged the autopilot. I really didn't fancy being stuck behind the wheel all the way across Lyme Bay with the engine going, but I didn't have to wait long for things to start going wrong.

At around 0900 the autopilot stopped working, in fact it shorted out the entire navigation bus. My attempts at fixing it failed. Having resigned myself to hand-steering to get us home, I noticed Pippin had become highly agitated down below.



The autopilot clutch lever which I have found, like others before me, disengages by itself



My autopilot drive unit needed to be replaced several times on the return leg



Jonathan Slatter

Jonathan runs Sounds Visual, a music and voiceover recording business in Bath. He keeps *Bear Poles*, a fin-keeled 1992 Moody 336, next to Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour and sails regularly with his dog Pippin.

He learned to sail with his father in a Mirror dinghy, then moved on to windsurfing. His first yacht was a Beneteau First 26, which he swapped for a First 285 before buying *Bear Poles*. He plans to sail to Brittany this summer.

I spent the rest of the passage with one hand on the wheel, my other arm cradling a wretchedly miserable dog with explosive diarrhoea. I agonised over what was best for Pippin – turn back to Dartmouth or push on to Weymouth or home. In the end we battled on. I couldn't see the compass and with nothing to point at, I used Navionics to steer across Lyme Bay.

After 12 hours on deck, we were relieved to be safely anchored in Studland and Pippin was the happiest dog ashore. It wasn't the best end to our holiday but we had enjoyed just short of 500 miles of sailing in four weeks, and I have finally sailed to Scilly. Pippin is currently seeing a dog therapist to get over the final leg. I am looking for a partner who likes to helm. ▲

No dogs were harmed in the making of this journey.