

# Scilly Sail for Cancer Research UK



Web site: [www.scilysail.com](http://www.scilysail.com)

At 17:17 hours on Friday 25 July 2008, 82 year old Tony Clee and 16 year old Beth White landed their 10 and a half foot Mirror dinghy on the beach at Marazion. They had just become the first people (at least in living memory) to make the 40 mile passage from the Isles of Scilly in such a small sailing boat.

The story behind their voyage began a few years ago when Tony developed throat cancer. With the help of healthcare workers and scientists he recovered. However, he felt indebted to those dedicated and hard working individuals so he decided that he would like, in a small way, to do something to prevent future generations suffering the dreadful affliction.

He decided to sail his Mirror dinghy from the Isles of Scilly to Marazion to raise money for Cancer Research UK. Accomplished Mount's Bay Sailing Club Mirror sailor, Beth White, agreed to accompany him. Tony is certain that they are the oldest and the youngest crew in the smallest sailing boat ever to attempt the 40 mile crossing.

Planning for the voyage started in 2007. The organization of such an event is a mammoth task; fortunately people came forward to assist. Mike Ashton agreed to provide the support boat: a 8.1 metre Scorpion RIB, powered by a 225hp Honda four-stroke engine and fully equipped with navigation and safety equipment. Dr Ian Roxburgh acted as liaison with Cancer Research UK and also assisted with pre-voyage passage planning. A number of other people were also involved with various tasks.

By June 2008 much of the planning was complete and on 25 June the decision was taken to set sail on Friday 25 July 2008 or as soon afterwards as weather and other safety considerations permit. Tides were a critical factor in deciding the date for the voyage.

Tony's Mirror, 'Auk', was prepared for the voyage and on 12 July sea trials were carried out in Mount's Bay with the support team. Radio and other safety procedures, towing, capsizing, boat to boat transfers, etc., were practiced. All went very well.

In the meantime, Tony and Wendy Kennan were heavily involved in promoting the event to the newspapers and radio and television stations. Tony and others, including Keith White, were busy chasing sponsorship.

Eventually, the date drew near.

Tony and Beth packed up Auk for the voyage and on Monday 21 July travelled with her on the Scillionian III (many thanks to the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company for providing Tony, Beth and Auk with free passage) to St. Mary's. St. Mary's Sailing Club provided both a pen space and a launching trolley. Auk's own launching trolley returned with Tony and Beth to Penzance.

The final briefing / discussion meeting was held at Mount's Bay Sailing Club on Wednesday evening, 23 July. After careful consideration of weather forecasts and other safety matters the decision was taken for the voyage team to travel to St. Mary's on the support RIB, 'Awesome Fun', the following day with the aim of making the return trip on either Friday or, more likely, Saturday.

The voyage team met on the pontoon in Newlyn harbour at 14:00 hours on Thursday. The wind was a brisk force 5 to 6 south-easterly and the sky was overcast. Having changed into suitable clothing for the crossing, we set off at 14:34 hours. The seas outside Newlyn harbour were choppy. We turned right towards Mousehole, passed inside St. Clements Island and set course for Scilly.

Passing Lamorna we increased speed to 20 knots, passed Porthcurno and headed for the Runnel Stone buoy. Just inside the Runnel Stone buoy the wind was fighting against the tide; we kept well clear. Visibility was not great so we set a compass course for St. Mary's. Wolf rock, some three miles to the south came into view and we increased speed again to 25 knots. We were now traveling across a 6 to 8 foot south-easterly swell.

Eventually, St Martin's came into view, followed by St. Mary's. We headed into Crow Sound, reduced speed to 15 knots. In the Sound the seas were relatively flat, but it was almost low tide so we had to thread our way carefully across Crow Bar, past Crow Rock, passing inside The Cow and down towards Hugh Town.

We slipped into the harbour at 16:20 hours, just before the Scillionian was leaving for Penzance. We tied up alongside, unloaded our luggage and made contact with the Harbour Master, who kindly allowed us to use one of the pontoons free of charge.

Accommodation was provided by Julie Moore of the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust. We stayed with some of the Trust's volunteers in a refurbished naval gun battery that was built in 1900, and added to during the two world wars, to control any approach to St. Mary's through North Channel or St. Mary's Sound. Quite an experience.

Tony treated us all to a drink and fish and chips. Tony and Beth then made some final checks on Auk and rigged her.

Following an examination of the latest weather forecasts and synoptic charts (thank you to the Bistro restaurant for internet access), it was clear that Friday was now likely to be the better day for the voyage: the forecast for the day was SSW force 2-4, veering a little more west later in the day and dropping to force 2. The forecast and charts for Saturday indicated insufficient wind to make the voyage.

We decided to get up at 05:00 hours and aim to set off at 06:20 hours, the optimum time for tides. Our advance passage planning had indicated that it was essential that we got the tidal flow right.

Despite Mirror crews not looking their best at 5 o'clock in the morning, we managed to get down to the harbour with all our gear by 06:00 hours. Wind was perfect, visibility was awful: probably only a mile or so – St. Mary's airport was closed to flights. However, we decided to go; we thought that visibility would probably get better – if it got worse we could always turn round and come back!



06:00 hours. St. Mary's harbour and the support RIB 'Awesome Fun'

Tony and Beth got Auk ready while the rest of us retrieved the RIB from the pontoon and stowed away all the gear. We finally set sail at 07:07 hours in a very light southerly breeze, and headed out of the harbour north-east into Crow Sound. Auk was on port tack.

We radioed Falmouth Coastguard to inform them that we were departing St. Mary's bound for Marazion accompanying a Mirror dinghy. Even though the passage plan had already been lodged with them there was a very long silence before we received a reply!

Once clear of the harbour Auk gybed onto starboard tack.



07:30 hours. Leaving St. Mary's harbour. Not much wind. Not much visibility.

By 08:00 hours 'Auk' had crossed Crow Bar and just passed the south cardinal mark for Hats rocks. The wind had increased to force 2-3 (still from the south) and the sea state was a 1 foot swell. Visibility had improved, but the sky was still overcast.

Over the next hour as Auk began to pull clear of the islands at 3 knots the seas gradually increased to a 2 foot swell. The skies were still overcast, but it was beginning to look like the perfect day for a sail.

Tony passed the helm to Beth, who decided immediately to hoist the spinnaker. The wind had now veered slightly towards the west, the seas had decreased a little and speed over ground increased to 5 knots. And the sun had finally come out.

By 10:30 hours we were out of sight of land and had reached the south bound shipping lane. Two ships, a small coaster and a container ship, passed ahead of us and then it was all clear. It was not until we were well clear that we saw any more south bound traffic.

Just before 11:00 hours we sighted the Scillionian; Ken Rogers, our navigator, made contact on the VHF and we staged some photographs for Wendy.



11:00. Passing the Scillionian



12:00 Beth let Wendy crew for a while

By 12:00 hours we had just cleared the north bound shipping lane and were some 3 miles north-west of Wolf Rock lighthouse. Rather surprisingly we saw no ships traveling north sufficiently close to cause any concern. The wind had now veered further, and steadied at force 3. Auk was now travelling at 5.5 knots with the spinnaker still flying.



12:15 hours (ish). Approaching Wolf Rock lighthouse

The wind continued to veer and by 13:00 hours we had a force 3 westerly. After more than 5 hours on starboard tack it was time to gybe onto port. Of course, there was no way that Beth was going to pull the spinnaker down now so the gybe was carried out with the spinnaker flying. We now had a 2 foot swell with some occasional larger waves to surf down. Auk was still managing 5.5 knots.



13:30 hours. Shipping off Land's End



13:38 Swell

To make the best use of the tidal flow we kept well clear of the coast. This did mean, however, that we had to keep a sharp eye out for shipping.

By 14:00 hours the wind had backed just a little and St. Michael's Mount came into view in the very far distance. Auk was now travelling at 4 knots. Over the next hour the wind began to drop. By the time we reached a point 1.5 miles south-west of Tater Du lighthouse it had dropped to force 2 and the swell had increased to 3 feet. Auk was now travelling at just over 2 knots.



16:00 hours. Just past Lamorna. Lay back sailing style!

Then as we passed into Mount's Bay the wind increased slightly. We passed Mousehole at 16:15 hours travelling at nearly 5 knots again.



16:30 hours. The end is in sight (at last!)

By 17:00 hours we were just south-west of St. Michael's Mount. The wind had dropped again and we were travelling at just 2.5 knots.

17 minutes later Auk reached the beach, 10 hours and 10 minutes after the start of the voyage. The voyage involved no tacking and just two gybes and Beth had that spinnaker flying for seven and a half hours! Surely another Mirror record!

Champagne, tea and splits were served in the Mount's Bay Sailing Club clubhouse by local members of Cancer Research UK, who also awarded Tony and Beth with medals for their splendid achievement.

If you would like to make a donation to Scilly Sail it is not too late. Please visit the [www.scillysail.com](http://www.scillysail.com) web site for details or contact Tony Clee.

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