



Bob and Elaine Hazell write about their 2018 summer cruise on Pipistrelle in the Baltic.

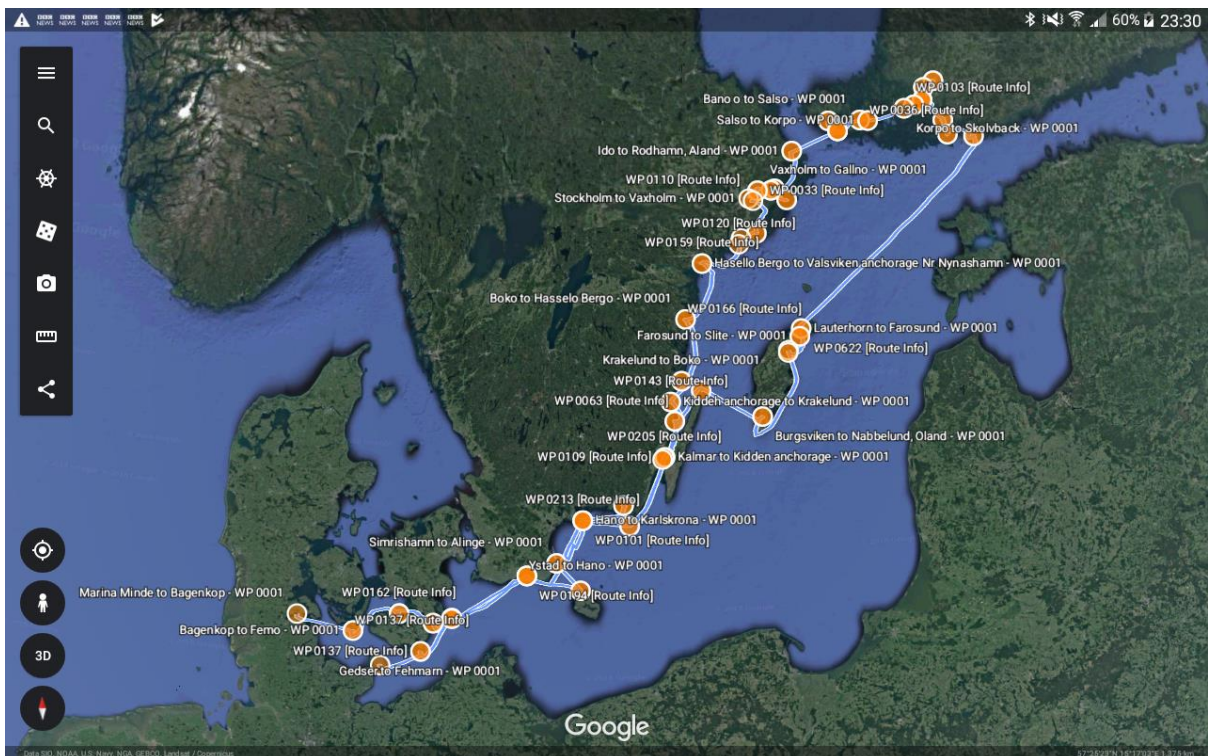
In 2017 they crossed the Atlantic with Martin Goodchild as crew for the Azores to Dublin leg, continuing to Scotland,



through the Caledonian Canal spending time in Norway, the west coast of Sweden and Denmark before laying Pipistrelle up for the winter in S holm, Southern Denmark.

Exceptional Baltic Cruising 2018 on Pipistrelle

Neither of us had sailed in the Baltic before, so this was unfinished business after our circumnavigation. We joined the Cruising Association to gain more detailed knowledge about the area, and also planned to join their Baltic Rally to Stockholm, a chance to make new friends and enjoy new sailing grounds. We were well aware that with our 14.8m length and draft of 2.2m, and no bow thruster, we would face a few challenges!



Our Route from Marina Minde, Denmark through the Baltic, 2018

After a short refit we left S holm, stopping briefly ‘around the corner’ in Marina Minde to make final preparations, before sailing through the Danish Islands.

Our plan was to head direct to Ystad in Sweden, but the weather had other ideas, and we found ourselves faced with a 60nm passage with a strong wind dead on the nose! Plan B came in handy, and we put in to Klintholm on the island of Møn to wait for more clement weather. What we thought would be a few days, turned into 10, but the scenery in this part of Denmark is superb, and Klintholm has a lot to offer with good local restaurants, walks along the coast, and a public bus to the spectacular chalk cliffs to the east.



Cliffs at Møn - note landslide and two people in the centre!

However, the delay meant we would disappointingly miss the Stockholm rally. Finally, we had a break in the weather with NW'ly winds, so set off for Ystad, arriving late in the afternoon, and had a challenging time mooring in the marina with the strong winds.

Next day we continued to the beautiful island of Hanø, with its lovely and incredibly well looked after harbour. Accessed only by passenger ferry, there is no motorised traffic on the island, which boasts a national park, populated by cattle and deer, and a lighthouse that still operates.



Pipistrelle in Hanø



Deer in National Park

We then sailed to Karlskrona, with its history as Sweden's main naval base, as unlike Stockholm it is far enough south not to be ice bound during the winter months. Continuing north to the major industrial port and city of Kalmar, we discovered the good well-equipped marina, and its famous castle which has a rich and interesting history. The Baltic Rally had started from here, and we followed in their wake north visiting some challenging anchorages, and amazing islands. We quickly learnt that Navionics did not provide all the detail we required, and that our paper charts were absolutely essential for checking the route and the detail. Further on we would find that large areas of the archipelagos are totally devoid of navigational detail, even on paper charts!

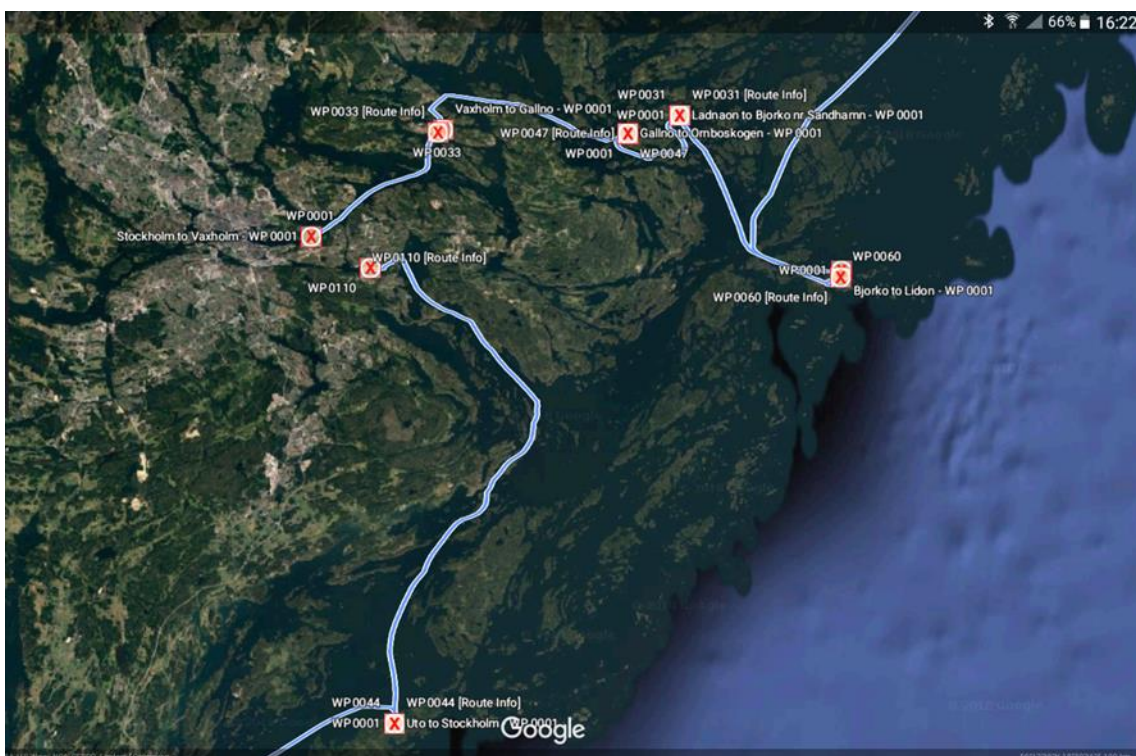




Before our approach to Stockholm, we spent a delightful few days anchored in the island of Utö. Here we met fellow sailors Lars and Stina Karlsson who like so many Scandinavians, own a summer house, as well as living in the capital.

Windmill on Utö

Our track from Utö to Stockholm and from Sockholm to Vaxholm and Sandhamn using LD Log



From Utö we sailed north west through a myriad of islands for Stockholm, and were met by other sailing friends at their yacht club just east of the city and who are also members of the Offshore Cruising Club, through which Elaine and I met sailing Overlord, a 58ft windfall yacht.

Stockholm is a fascinating capital built on several islands with interesting architecture. We moored at Navishamn marina, close to the city centre, the first time bows to, providing an instant challenge as we did not have a ladder to hang from the pulpit and the drop to the pontoon was a stretch too far! But a Swiss couple from an adjoining 55ft Discovery came to our rescue, lending us theirs, giving us time to order one from an extremely well stocked city chandlery.



The Royal Battleship Vasa – sunk in 1628 at the start of her maiden voyage

The tram to the centre of Stockholm stops right outside the marina, and having bought a pass, we had quick and easy access into the city. The Vasa Museum was at the top of our Must Do list. Advice to get there early, 09.00, was good, enabling us to gently wander around, taking photos without others being in the way, as it gets very crowded from 10.00 onwards!

On another morning Lars and Stina drove us out to the King's Palace and grounds at Drottningholm which turned into a really special day. We also spent Midsummer's Eve in Stockholm, which is a really big celebration for all Swedes (and Finns) who celebrate by dancing round their version of the Maypole. We were constantly surprised by how relatively few people live in Stockholm, just under 1 million compared to nearly 9 million in London - so traffic is light and getting around is easy!

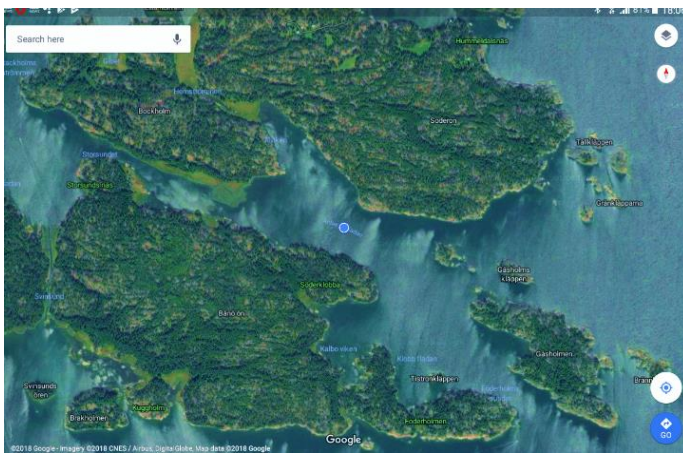


Drottningholm Palace and The Maypole

From Mariehamn West we day-hopped for 10 days through the stunning archipelago to Turku, in Finland and found this area of the Baltic exceeded all our expectations. Many of the islands are uninhabited, and choosing our passages involved closely studying the paper charts together with the recommended tracks, then creating our own route on Navionics. Whilst underway we could check online with an App called Sailmate that enabled us to refer to the local charts electronically.

We found ourselves spending night after night in the most beautiful quiet anchorages, but being so far north in midsummer, it was only dark for about 3 hours from midnight until 0300, and we were grateful for our sunlight blocking cabin curtains! Almost every day we were swimming in water temperatures of 25C, and air temperatures in excess of 30C! We were having the most incredible summer, with just continuous sunshine and relatively calm seas.

Protected anchorage at Båno Ön, east of Mariehamn

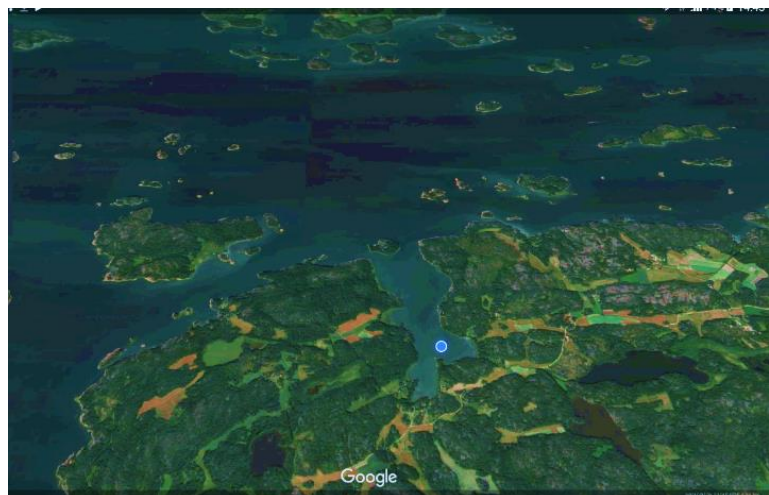


The wildlife was remarkable too, and so different from Europe generally thanks to the low salinity levels in the Baltic. We saw mute swans on almost every island, and it was fascinating to think back to the tiny cygnets following their parents in Kalmar, and then seeing similar cygnets develop as time passed. So many varieties of ducks, and cormorants, Canada geese and the barnacle goose, as well as white tailed eagles and osprey, the list was endless.

Secluded anchorage at Toras Viken, south of Turku

With its medieval fortress, Turku is an interesting city on the River Aura where we moored in the city marina – bows to, but this time with a ladder!

Apart from the usual housekeeping chores, we also enjoyed sightseeing, a concert in the cathedral and some excellent meals ashore.



The boarding ladder



Turku Cathedral, outside



And inside!

After having met friends from Reading who had arrived by ferry to holiday at their nearby summerhouse, we also welcomed the arrival of Chris Nelson who joined us for a week. We have known Chris since meeting him on the ARC 2009, and he has sailed with us on a number of occasions since. Apart from sailing, he is now into drones in a big way, is licensed and insured, and he brought one with him that folds neatly into a backpack for ease when travelling!

We sailed from Turku on the afternoon Chris arrived, and anchored some 15nm away in a delightful anchorage at Sjalo where we had spent a couple of days on our way to Turku. This was our first experience of having a drone on board, and Chris was keen to demonstrate take-off and landing procedures, from the bathing platform.



Typical of so many, our anchorage at Sjalo.



We were on a timeline, as Chris was leaving us at Hanko, six days later, so we left the next morning, with the aim of learning to operate the drone successfully whilst underway, but not before having the full moon rising above the top of the mast!



On the island of Hamnholmen ...



... and finally at Mossabrantarna,

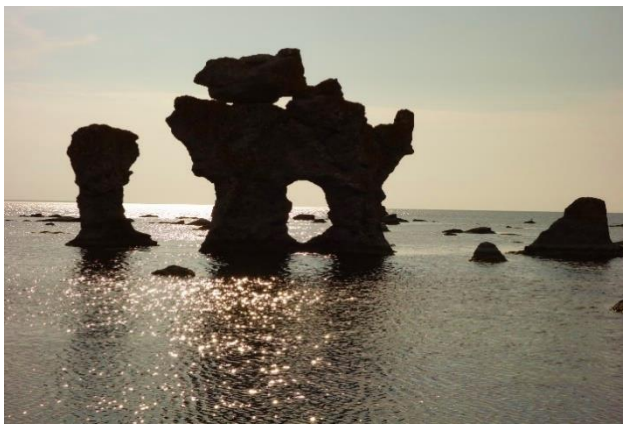
before the weather deteriorated, and flying the drone became impossible.

Whilst we had been blessed with amazing weather, we were now to experience strong winds. We had a difficult time in the marina at Hanko, being pinned to a finger pontoon by 30kn on the beam, an experience that demonstrated the importance of a bow thruster, but thanks to the marina manager, we were towed off the pontoon early the next morning, with reduced mooring fees!

Our next destination was the Swedish island of Gotland, 154nm away and our one and only overnight passage in the Baltic. What a contrast to previous years! In light winds, we had to resort to motor sailing in the early hours. During the day we sailed into a large area of blue-green algae, which necessitated cleaning the engine water filter on arrival at Gotland. Baltic Sea oxygen levels are at a '1,500-year low due to human activity'.



Nutrient run-off from agriculture and urban sewage are likely to be to blame, scientists say.



Slite, only 7nm away!

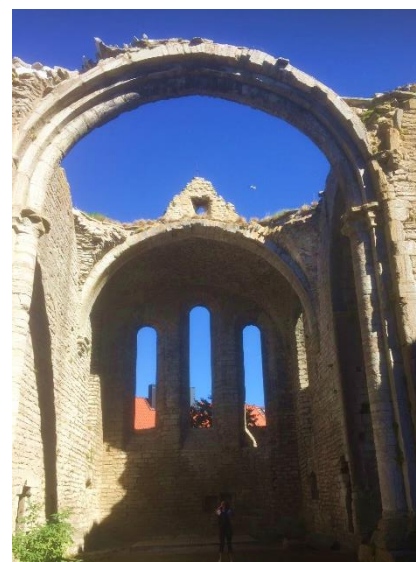
We made landfall at Lauterhorn on the island of Fårö, renowned for its sea stacks, anchoring for a couple of days in this idyll, before heading south along the east coast.

We had arranged to meet Bob's daughter and family, who would be staying in a cabin on a holiday camp, on the NE coast at Vitviken. This turned out to be a good location for us to anchor Pipistrelle and leave the dinghy on the sandy beach. If the weather became inclement, we could shelter at the marina at



Gotland itself is very interesting. The capital is Visby on the west coast, a UNESCO World Heritage Centre. A former Viking site, Visby was the main hub of the Hanseatic League in the Baltic from the 12th to the 14th century. Its 13th century ramparts and more than 200 warehouses and wealthy merchants' dwellings from the same period make it the best preserved fortified commercial city in northern Europe, and was well worth visiting.

From a sailing perspective, the Visby marina is good providing you are happy with extortionate rates! We weren't, and moored Pipistrelle in Slite which was well protected and inexpensive, catching the bus from the marina to Visby, a 30-minute journey, and again cheap.





After the family holiday we moved on south, and retraced our passage to the south of Sweden, with two exceptions.

Off the extreme SE coast of Sweden, we visited Utklippan, a small group of islands which used to be a fishing harbour. When we arrived one other yacht was there, and then three others arrived later in the afternoon. Only accessible in settled weather, navigating our way in and out was nonetheless interesting, as you can see!

Pipistrelle (tallest mast) alongside



It was so beautiful, we stayed for two nights and were fascinated to see this smooth snake (*Coronella Austriaca*), which is not poisonous, but does eat the rare toads on the island. Hence the snakes are trapped, and returned to the mainland. In the spring the following year, they swim the 5 miles back to the islands!

After revisiting Hanö, we put in to Simrishamn on the Swedish coast, and then headed south to Bornholm, mooring on the outer harbour wall at Allinge, in the NE. Bornholm is Danish, and having become used to scorched grass and wilting trees as a result of the hot, dry summer, we were surprised to find how lush the island was, green meadows and thriving woodlands! With our friends we hiked across the island to see other old fishing harbours converted to marinas, and stone quarries, now used as visitor attractions complete with zip wires and rock climbing.



Poled out leaving Bornholm (courtesy Andreas, Ma Brummi)

At this point the weather was becoming decidedly unsettled, and we were satisfied with our decision to plan to be at our destination, the German island of Fehmarn, by the end of August. So we left for Ystad which was far more pleasant on this occasion, and then NW'ly winds obliged to enable us to head SW for stops at Klintholm, Gedser, and finally Fehmarn.

There at the marina in Burgtiefe we removed all sails and running rigging, before motoring the short distance to Weilandt's boatyard for our lift out and winter storage in a shed.

Conclusion

We enjoyed an exceptional summer, in fact one of the highlights of our ten years' cruising. The archipelagos of Stockholm, Åland and Finland are simply breath-taking. The air is clean and clear, with warm seas as mentioned. Apart from the holiday month of July, it is definitely not busy like the Med, and prices are reasonable even by Scandinavian standards. But the advice is to stock up in Sweden or better still in Germany as the shopping basket is dearer in Denmark, and in Finland eye wateringly expensive (especially alcohol).

We met very welcoming and friendly cruisers of many different nationalities and people who have been sailing the Baltic for 20 years, still finding places that are new to them! We return to Fehmarn in May, to then sail east along the German coast and into Poland, before turning west for the Kiel Canal and bringing Pipistrelle home to Southampton at the end of August. Though she will be offered for sale, we definitely hope to return in future in a slightly smaller yacht to continue exploring the Baltic which we thoroughly recommend to GXSA members.

Note: all drone photographs are copyright DroneforcePhotography and may not be reproduced, copied or published without permission of the owner. All other photographs are copyright Pipistrelle unless otherwise stated.