

Helgoland or perhaps *Heyligeland**

By John Apps

Whenever I hear the shipping forecast and the German Bight is mentioned my thoughts immediately go to one of my favourite summer places, Helgoland. Ever since I first to the Baltic in 2002 it seems I have to keep going back. On my return I am constantly drawn to spend a couple of days in Helgoland.



I had been toying with the idea of a Bornholm High that dominated the Baltic much like the Azores High dominates the North Atlantic in summer. However the month I spent on Bornholm this year had more gales than calms. So instead I have decided that maybe there is a Helgoland High that dominates the German Bight in summer. At least this year on both going in and going out I had very little wind in the German bight and had to motor both ways from Borkum to Cuxhaven, including my visit to Helgoland.

Helgoland has an interesting history of possession a bit like the Channel Islands they seem to be in a situation where its at the mercy of its bigger neighbours and in one case distant neighbours (the UK) taking possession of them. Britain has actually owned them twice from 1807 to 1890 and then again from 1945 to 1952. The population was moved off by the British in 1945 despite having one of the few German Resistance Groups during the war. During this post war period it was largely used as a RAF bombing range although the Royal Navy also blew a hole in the middle of the island in 1947. This is

considered to be one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions in history and changed the geology of the island.



The harbour pictured above (The Binnenhafen) is now closed as they try and recover the unexploded bombs remaining from the RAF practice runs. I had arrived in the middle of the night and anchored off the main entrance to the northern or main harbour not wishing to disturb a raft of sailing boats at 3am. At dawn I was awoken by a very lumpy sea caused by a tide change and decided to motor around to what used to be the fuel berth in the upper right hand corner of the picture. Due to poor light conditions I missed the no entry sign below and was very rapidly told off by a number of people out and about on the harbour wall at dawn. Fortunately my motoring into and out of the harbour caused no bombs to explode. This is not surprising as they all seem to have been dormant for 74 years.



Helgoland is a duty-free port and as a result the fuel is very cheap in comparison to the rest of Germany. On this visit it was 1.08 euros/litre, on a previous visit three years ago it was .85 euros/litre. What keeps the Helgoland economy going is the massive flow of day trippers from Cuxhaven and Busum that come over by ferry to buy cheap alcohol and cigarettes. When the ferries arrive it appears like an invasion with people wheeling

suitcases along to take home their duty free purchases. I find this a good time to retire to the boat and read.

It is not expensive to stay at Helgoland. For a 10 metre boat I pay 10 euros a night plus around 3 euros per person tourist tax. However the showers are another matter, at 4 euros for a shower they are not cheap particularly when the coin operated machines take your money and only provide cold water. I find it easier to boil a kettle and have a scrub aboard.

Staying overnight in the busy season will mean rafting up. I was in a raft of 9 boats in a less used part of the small craft harbour and because I had joined the raft early in the day I was the third boat from the pontoon. But the Germans like the Dutch seem to accept rafting as part of summer boating and are very good about accepting you tramping over their boat or wanting to leave at an inconvenient time. In fact I was catching a different tide to everyone else as I wanted to go west but found it easier to stem a foul tide than remake and break up the raft 6 hours later. Everyone else was off to Hamburg or Wilhelmshaven or staying another night.



The best piece of advice I can offer anyone wishing to visit Helgoland is that it is very important to realize that the German TSS starts between Helgoland and the Wasser and Jade Rivers and unlike most other European TSSs it is against the law for small boats to cross and you may be subject to a hefty fine if you should do so. So, if coming from the UK by way of the Friesian Islands wait until the Wasser and Jade estuary before turning north and if returning to the UK go south to the Estuary before continuing your journey.

**Heyligeland means Holy Land which with its neighbouring island of 'Dune' which in my mind is featured in the Frank Herbert novels of the same name has a special significance. I made sure on this visit to read 'Dune Messiah' while reading on 'Raven' and avoiding the tourist influx.:-)*