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The Pilotage Foundation is grateful to John Lawson who was the author of all our Passage Planning routes flowing out from the South Coast of England to Iceland, The Baltic, the Atlantic Islands and the Mediterranean.

This Route was updated by Charles Lambrick in 2008

Route 8 English Channel to Gibraltar via South Brittany and North Spain

For text version, see below

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General

The shortest direct distance from Ouessant to the NW corner of Spain is just over 300 miles. Fuel consumption or other considerations may make the diversion along the South Brittany coast to La Gironde and thence across to the vicinity of Bilbao more attractive. This will add about 30% to the total English Channel to Gibraltar distance of 1200 miles.

Weather and sea states

North Biscay

The Azores High tends to move N in summer forcing the Atlantic lows in the same direction to pass over the British Isles. These usually trail fronts that pass over the Bay of Biscay on which secondaries can develop to give strong winds. The risk of encountering these decreases as progress is made SE. The winds in summer are predominantly from the NW sector from NE through W to SW. Gales occur less than 3% of the time in the summer months, as do calms. In settled weather along the coast to La Gironde land and sea breezes of no great strength will influence the local weather.

Swell is generated by Atlantic depressions passing to the N and the direction is mainly from the W or NW.

Sea temperature is about 18°C in the Bay in August increasing to 21°C in the SE corner.

Fog occasionally occurs in the NW part of the area but becomes increasingly unlikely further SE.

North Spanish coast

The prevailing winds are from the NW to SW although in midsummer the frequency of winds from the NE increases. Unless a secondary depression unusually comes this far S, these winds are moderate and the incidence of gales in the summer is low.

Swell from the NW sector is very much a feature on this coast. Only one of the ports mentioned in this chapter has access restricted by swell

The summer sea temperature varies from 18°C in the W to 21°C in the E.

Fog is rare at the E end of the coast but becomes increasingly prevalent towards the W end where up to four days a month can be expected.

Currents

Currents are of little practical importance in planning this passage, are largely wind induced and often negated by tidal flow.

Tidal streams

Streams are strong and of importance as far S as Penmarch but thereafter become increasingly weak except in river estuaries.

Tides

The Spring ranges decrease progressively from 5.9m around Ouessant, 3.4m off La Gironde to 3.3m at La Coruña. The Standard Ports are Brest, Pointe de Grave and La Coruña.

Formalities

The usual EU regulations apply. See the second page of Route 7 for full details of the formalities required in France, Spain, Portugal and Gibraltar.

Search and rescue

The Bay of Biscay from Ouessant to La Coruña is covered by the French MRCC at Corsen (near Ouessant) and two MRSCs at Etel and Soulac (La Gironde entrance). The north Spanish coast is covered by the MRCCs at Bilbao and Gijon and two MRSCs at Santander and La Coruña. There are other sub stations so that the VHF DSC and Voice coverage is complete along both coasts. In addition the Spanish still have a few coastal radio stations although they do NOT keep watch on Ch 16 (but they do on DSC).

France and Spain maintain SAR helicopters.

Further details may be found in Admiralty Maritime Communications (UK and Mediterranean) NP 289.

Navtex and weather forecasts

The route is fully covered by Navtex broadcasts from Niton (E and K), Corsen (A and E) and La Coruña (D), as well as by several daytime VHF weather forecasts from the French and Spanish stations. See Admiralty Maritime communications (UK and Mediterranean) NP 289 for details and RYA G5/04

Fuel and domestic gas

France

The use of low tax red diesel – known as *fuel oil domestique* or FOD in France – is officially permitted in yachts for use with generators or heater units provided they are supplied from a different tank to the main engine. Difficulty may be found convincing a supplier that this is the case for bulk deliveries but there should be no objection from Customs or suppliers in securing a limited amount in cans.

Recent receipts for red diesel obtained in the UK or Channel Islands should be retained and produced if needed. A ‘reasonable quantity’ of such fuel carried in vessels tanks can be imported into France without further formality or payment of tax.

FOD however is rarely available at marinas and only from fishing ports. Marinas supply fully taxed diesel from pumps which are now almost all operated by a credit card which must have a chip incorporated in it. There are still some British cards which do not have a chip in them and the reliability of some pump operated systems with foreign cards are not what they might be. Sufficient cash to pay for fuel needed until at least the next major port should always be carried.

Petrol is often also supplied by pump at marinas otherwise recourse must be made to the nearest garage.

Spain

There are two types of fuel - *Gasoleo A* which is taxed and available for yachts, and *Gasoleo B* which is untaxed and available for fishing boats. Pumps with Gasoleo A are usually found only in marinas or ports with yachting facilities otherwise it must be carried by can from the nearest garage. Sometimes it can be supplied by road tanker. Gasoleo B is widely available by pump in nearly all fishing ports but it is unlikely now that it will be supplied to yachts. Marinas in the bigger ports may accept credit cards for fuel but enough cash should be carried to cover the cost.

Portugal

There are two types of diesel as in Spain but they usually come out of the same pump and the yachtsman pays the duty paid price.

Some of the newer marinas may accept cards but enough cash should be carried to cover the cost

Indication is given in each port section how fuel may be obtained, whether there is any restriction for larger quantities, access to the berth and opening hours for supply. It is prudent to radio ahead to the Port Authority if a quick refuelling stop only is required.

Domestic gas

Butane in the form of Camping Gas is available in France, Spain and Portugal. It may still be possible to find a Portuguese gas depot that will charge Calor cylinders if the right adaptors are carried. Butagaz is widely available in France and only needs a special regulator to be used with Calor appliances.

Routeing recommendations

Going south

See Route 7 for the options for rounding Ouessant. Thereafter low-powered vessels will need to carry a fair stream through the Raz de Sein and possibly past Penmarch. There is a rich selection of ports from there on until La Gironde is reached. If heading across to Spain from Pornichet or Les Sables d'Olonne the Rochebonne Plateau must be avoided. The crossings from La Gironde(Royan) are 160M to Bilbao, 175M to Santander.

S of La Gironde harbours become few and far between to Bayonne whence the full 350 miles W along the N Spanish coast to the NW corner must be faced. However there are many delightful ports and harbours, on a beautiful coast with a stunning mountain backdrop, if time is of no importance.

Going north

Once the most northerly point at Punta de la Estaca de Bares is rounded after Cariño it becomes a matter of necessity, taste or the weather when the north Spanish coast is left and the SE corner of the Bay crossed to South Brittany. Concarneau, Belle Ile, Pornichet, Les Sables d'Olonne and Royan are roughly equidistant from Cariño at around 300 miles. To reduce this crossing to 160 miles to Royan, a diversion of 233 miles E along the N Spanish coast to Bilbao must be made with various options en route of when to strike off to the NE.

Ports on the route

There is a multitude of ports to choose from along the South Brittany coast and plenty along the north Spanish coast. The ones chosen are about 50 miles apart and have all-weather access unless otherwise stated. Ports in capital letters indicate a port with major marina facilities including slipping and all kinds of repair, electricity and water on the pontoons with the resources of a town or city nearby. Other ports will have many of these facilities but with any omissions noted.

See Route 7 for details of French and Channel Island ports E of Ouessant.

Port categories

Ports are categorised for their accessibility in all weathers and the security of shelter.

- A Port of refuge in storms; complete shelter
- A* Qualified storm port of refuge and haven.
- B Port accessible in gales with good shelter.
- B* Qualified gale port of refuge and haven.
- C Entry subject to wind, tide and swell with some shelter inside.

Distance table

	SOLENT	PLYMOUTH	BREST	Concarneau	P.Haliguen	Le Palais	Pornichet	LES SABLES	ROYAN	BILBAO	SANT'NDER	Rib'sella	GIJON	Ribadeo	Cariño	GIBRALTAR
SOLENT	***	***	243	308	356	402	390	450	518	***	***	***	***	***	521	1242
PLYMOUTH	***	***	157	222	270	316	304	364	432	***	***	***	***	***	435	1156
BREST/Camaret	243	157	***	65	113	159	147	207	275	***	***	***	296	307	312	1006
Concarneau	308	222	65	***	48	46	82	142	210	***	***	267	267	290	295	1018
P.Haliguen	356	270	113	48	***	***	34	94	162	252	250	255	265	287	307	1019
Le Palais/Belle Is.	402	316	159	46	***	***	33	60	128	243	235	250	255	285	296	1009
Pornichet	390	304	147	82	34	33	***	60	128	238	232	252	260	295	312	1026
LES SABLES D'O	450	364	207	142	94	60	60	***	68	195	202	226	237	278	305	1011
ROYAN	518	432	275	210	162	128	128	68	***	160	175	212	230	280	312	1024
BILBAO	***	***	***	***	252	243	238	195	160	***	39	98	125	191	233	944
SANTANDER	***	***	***	***	250	235	232	202	175	39	***	59	86	152	194	905
Ribadesella	***	***	***	267	255	250	252	226	212	98	59	***	27	93	135	846
GIJON	***	***	295	267	265	255	260	237	230	125	86	27	***	66	108	819
Ribadeo	***	***	307	290	287	285	295	278	280	191	152	93	66	***	42	753
Cariño	521	435	312	295	307	295	312	305	312	233	194	135	108	42	***	711
GIBRALTAR	1242	1156	1006	1018	1019	1009	1026	1011	1024	944	905	846	819	753	711	***

Distances are direct between any two ports in different columns. Interpolated distances between ports in the same column will not necessarily be correct

BREST A

A major naval and commercial port with a large marina near the city with every possible facility. Entrance channel is dredged to 2m with 4m inside in places; 35 ton travel lift and craneage; duty-paid fuel available in any quantities; a safe place to leave a yacht with good railway connections and twice daily flights to Paris. The only snag is that the marina is 15 miles off track between the Chenal du Four and the Raz de Sein.

An alternative with less diversion is:-

Camaret A*

Uncomfortable in N and E winds but the new inner marina is sheltered and a new wavebreaker in the outer marina has improved things; pontoon berths for yachts drawing up to 3m; anything longer than 15m may have to go to a buoy; duty-paid fuel available at a berth easy of access; a good walk for provisions except from the inner marina.

CONCARNEAU A

A busy fishing port with excellent yacht facilities in the outer part; marina has 2.5m in parts but there might be difficulty for yachts over 20m; excellent place to provision but fuelling is tidal limited for the deeper drafts; bus connection only to Quimper.

An alternative close by is **Port La Forêt** with 2m in the approach and marina where it would be safer to leave a boat but not so good for provisioning except by bus to the nearby hypermarket.

Port Haliguen A*

Open to the NE; a large marina situated 2M to the NW of La Teignouse, the S point of Quiberon; up to 3m in the marina and able to accommodate yachts up to 20m; duty-paid fuel available in reasonable quantities but a 15 minute walk to the supermarket from the visitors berths; bus and train connections.

Le Palais, Belle Ile B*

Open to the E and subject to swell. A very crowded little port but included as the island is on the direct route SE/NW; deep entrance and 2-3m inside, 15m the maximum practical length; limited fuel, and water by can; frequent ferries to the mainland.

Pornichet A*

Somewhat open to the W. A large modern marina which caters for visitors; deep approaches and up to 2.5m in the marina in which a soft mud bottom gives some latitude; vessels over 20m may find difficulty manoeuvring inside; duty-paid fuel just inside entrance plus usual marina facilities with 25 ton travel lift, but the shops are a good ½M; buses to nearby St.Nazaire where there are good rail and air connections; a safe place to leave a yacht.

LES SABLES D'OLONNE B*

The shoal approach is open to the S sector but is safe enough near HW in gales. Despite this limitation it is one of the premier French yachting centres; 1.1m at the entrance, channel dredged to 1.5m and up to 3.5 in the marina; all facilities at hand including duty-paid fuel in all quantities and reasonable shopping; good road and rail connections with a small grass airfield.

ROYAN B*

Royan itself is inside La Gironde estuary and well sheltered. The outer approaches to the estuary should not be considered in strong W or SW winds especially on the ebb; entrance channel to marina dredged to 1.7m and the marina to 2.5m, up to at least 20m can be accommodated; handy duty-paid fuel, shops close by, 26 ton travel lift and all yachting facilities; good road and rail connections; ferry to Port Bloc whence Bordeaux and its airfield may be reached. There is a large new marina at **Port Médoc** just S of Port Bloc near Verdon which should be fully operational for the 2005 season.

Continuing S down the coast now adds distance to the total and it is 130 miles to **Bayonne**, the first port accessible in any westerly weather, although **Capbreton** 10M closer is an alternative. Across the corner, going W along the N coast **St Jean de Luz, Fuenterrabia/Hendaye, Getaria and Zumaia** all have marinas, are yacht-friendly and have the usual facilities. The passage maker will cut this corner and cross the 160M at least to **Bilbao**.

BILBAO A

A vast man-made harbour sheltering large industrial complexes and a major city; two first class marinas before the industry and the city are reached at Getxco and Las Arenas with 3m in both and able to accommodate up to 20m; duty paid fuel in any quantities and provisioning reasonably easy; local airport has some direct UK flights, otherwise via Madrid; slow rail and good road connections E and W; ferry to Portsmouth.

SANTANDER A

A large city and harbour with a big marina 5M from the entrance; this has 5.6m in the approaches and at least 2.5m inside; 20m could be accommodated; 25 ton travel lift, duty paid fuel in any quantities and all facilities except provisions which are 15 minutes away by occasional bus, or taxi; airport is close with twice daily flights to Madrid, slow rail and good road communications E and W; ferries to Plymouth; a safe place to leave a boat

Ribadesella C

Not to be attempted in any swell or strong N winds but possible in all but worst conditions for 2 hours before HW; a fishing port with at least 2.1m in the narrow channel; there is between 4 and 1m on quay; duty- free diesel by pump, duty-paid by can from nearby filling station; water on quay; handy shopping but not good communications. The new, small marina is for locals only.

GIJON B

A major city and marina. The shallow approach to the latter may not be possible in northerly storms or extreme swell but the commercial port of Musel 3M away offers complete shelter in all conditions. 3.5m in the approaches, 3.2m in entrance and most of marina carries 3m; duty-paid fuel in any quantities, 20 ton travel lift, shops 10 minutes walk; airport 30 minutes by taxi with flights to Madrid; slow rail and good road E and W; a good place to leave a boat.

Ribadeo B

An entry in a N storm would be unwise but otherwise a safe and easy entrance to the estuary; berths in new marina for up to 18m in 3 – 5m; duty-paid fuel berth; water and electricity on pontoons; shops up in the town and a bit of a climb; communications only by bus and a long way to nearest airport or ferry.

Cariño

See Route 7 for this port and onwards towards Gibraltar.

Route 8

Waypoint Table

THESE WAYPOINTS SHOULD BE USED FOR PLANNING ONLY AND NEVER FOR NAVIGATION

Waypoints are given to the nearest minute of latitude and longitude and are positioned in clear water off the ports or headlands.

Turning Points (TP) to avoid land or navigational hazards are also noted in the table.

The symbol * between two points denotes that the direct route between them passes over or close to land or other dangers.

Port or point	Lat	Long
SOLENT (Needles)	50 39N	01 37W
*		*
Plymouth	50 19	04 10
Ile d'Ouessant(off SW corner)	48 24	05 09
*		*
BREST/Camaret	48 20	04 36
*		*
TP Raz de Sein	48 03	04 46
*		*
TP Pointe de Penmarch	47 44	04 17
*		*
Concarneau	47 51	03 56
*		*
Port Haliguen	47 30	03 05
*		*
Le Palais/Belle Ile	47 21	03 08
*		*
Pornichet	47 15	02 21
*		*
LES SABLES D'OLONNE	46 28	01 47
*		*
ROYAN	45 35	01 03
*		*
BILBAO	43 24	03 02
*		*
SANTANDER	43 29	03 46
*		*
Ribadesella	43 28	05 04
*		*
GIJON	43 34	05 40
*		*
Ribadeo	43 34	07 02
*		*
Cariño	43 45	07 51
*		*
LA CORUÑA	43 22	08 22

Port or point	Lat	Long
* TP Cabo Villano	43 10	09 15 *
* TP Cabo de São Vicente	37 00	09 00 *
* TP Cabo Trafalgar	36 11	06 04 *
* GIBRALTAR	36 09	05 22 *

References

Admiralty Channel Pilot, NP 27
 Admiralty Bay of Biscay Pilot, NP 22
 Admiralty Tide Tables Vol 1, NP 201
 Admiralty Maritime Communications (UK and Mediterranean), NP 289
 RYA Planning a Foreign Cruise C1/04
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