

SERENELY SCILLY 1996

Saturday 20th July

When Rachel returned from camping on St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, during her school's Enrichment Week, she was unusually enthusiastic about how lovely it was there and how we really should go. We took her at her word and booked a two-week holiday for the following summer. Rachel would be coming with us, but unfortunately our son Daniel couldn't, as he would be starting a year's work placement for his degree in Electronic Engineering. Also, we would be self-catering in a real rented building, rather than a flimsy tent.

It felt very strange saying goodbye to Daniel when we left at just gone 09:00 to drive to the tiny airport at Land's End and I have to say I didn't like the feeling. I also didn't like the feeling that I would soon be taking my seventh flight in a very small plane, but I tried not to think about that too much as we drove past an accident at Dobwalls and then became stuck in a traffic jam at Bodmin. We decided to abandon our planned stop at Truro for coffee, but managed to slip a quick one in at a Little Chef en route.

We made it to Penzance in good time, so stopped there for Rachel to finish spending her birthday money on a pair of shoes and a small bag. It was midday by that time, so we ate our packed lunch in the car (that is to say, I just ate a piece of cake, as nerves were seriously beginning to take hold). It was then time to drive on to the airport, which we almost were unable to find. Alan stopped to ask directions and found we'd overshot the turning. As long as the plane didn't overshoot the runway at St Mary's later on...

We arrived at the tiny airport two minutes before the allotted booking-in time, but weren't actually the last to arrive, as the traffic had become steadily worse. Our baggage was weighed, along with us (what?) and then we had to wait for about 30 minutes with only a safety video to occupy us. Crunch time came, although not literally, thank the powers that be, when we were led out on to the airfield with four other passengers. Yes, it was *that* small! It was, in fact, a BN-2 Islander with only ten seats including one for the pilot, which is always a good move. I began to wonder exactly what I'd let myself in for.

I tried very hard to engage my sense of adventure and on the whole didn't feel too bad, as I strangely seem to feel safer in smaller planes. Rachel was shown into a seat in front of the baggage at the back, while Alan and I were seated in front of her. She seemed a little nervous, unsure of quite what to expect. Take-off wasn't too bad, even quite exciting in a dead scary kind of way. If I knew I definitely wasn't going to crash, I might actually enjoy flying. As it was, I took a couple of photos to distract myself and was pleased that Rachel was absolutely fine. "This is well cool!" she said, smiling happily.

The plane was flying at 1,000 feet and the sea looked very calm, a perfect day for travelling either by air or sea. The flight took just over 15 minutes, which was nothing much at all, although I still kept surreptitiously looking at my watch. After touchdown, we were taken to a minibus and driven straight to our accommodation. The driver was very friendly and the air felt warm and pleasant. The flat itself, called The Bylet, looked comfortable and clean, so all was well.



Landed! Isles of Scilly airport

We'd had some food pre-delivered for our arrival, but after a reviving mug of tea, walked to the Co-op in the town centre that Rachel remembered from her visit last year. We boosted our food supplies and splashed out on the cheapest bottle of wine we could find, costing £3.89 instead of the usual £1.99 Somerfield specials at home. There was also an invitingly interesting shop selling books, postcards and souvenirs that begs further investigation, although Alan bought a booklet right away about prehistoric sites on the islands.

Back at the flat, Rachel kindly made herself and me a salmon sandwich plus salad items, while Alan opted for a baked potato, followed by yoghurt for dessert. Not very long afterwards, the woman who owns The Bylet guest house called by to introduce herself and was very informative and helpful. In fact, everyone seems exceptionally friendly here.

At around 18:00, Alan and I strolled back to the centre (called Hugh Town) and on to the harbour to suss out the boat trip situation, which was looking good, that is to say, fairly frequent and not too expensive. The Isles of Scilly form an archipelago of over 200 islands and rocks, but there are only five inhabited islands, of which St Mary's is the largest. The other inhabited islands are Tresco, Bryher, St Agnes and St Martin's. The island of Samson was inhabited until 1855, when the remaining two families on the island were found to be suffering from malnutrition, due to a diet of mainly limpets and potatoes.

St Mary's harbour was looking very picturesque in the early evening sun, with blue sea and sky and hundreds of boats of different shapes and sizes. Over the years, the harbour has acted as both a refuge and a vital gateway for the vast majority of the island's freight. We could see other islands in the distance and our wellbeing rose perceptibly, as it felt almost idyllic.

There was a sense of being among people who love where they live and who trust each other, as simply by walking along the street, we noticed doors left open and keys left in cars, etc. There were enormous succulent plants in some people's gardens, the like of which you would only see in a hotter climate than the mainland. I was already beginning to fall in love with the Isles of Scilly.

An hour later, we returned to find Rachel ensconced in a 350-piece jigsaw she'd found that belongs to the flat, along with several interesting books. I suspect we will be availing ourselves of the books in days to come, as both Alan and Rachel are fast readers. For the present, though, we relaxed by watching *Superman* on television, followed by a mug of tea and a quiet book/jigsaw session, followed by *ER* on television, followed by bed. Rachel finished the jigsaw.

Sunday 21st July

I slept a little fitfully but OK, whereas Rachel didn't sleep well. It was cloudy as we drank an early mug of tea, but gradually blue sky appeared and by the time we were ready to leave at 10:00 with a packed lunch for a coastal walk around the island, it promised to be a bright, dry day and perfect for walking.

It was so uplifting to walk amid such wonderful scenery, with weird granite rock formations rising up from natural greenery, blue bays, boats and the so-called 'off-islands' in the distance. No wonder the Isles of Scilly were designated an area of outstanding natural beauty in 1975. The call of seabirds was a constant evocative cry and with few people along the way, we felt free and at peace.



Rachel with Hugh Town in the background

The only problem was that it began to be very warm as the sun rose higher and the clouds totally departed. By midday I was feeling horribly hot and very glad to sit in the shade of a large rock to eat our cheese and cucumber sandwiches. Alan and Rachel said they were comfortable with the heat, so it was just me, but I was glad we at least had plenty of water to drink.

As we carried on, we came across more glorious views, bulb fields and even a prehistoric burial chamber. However, by the time we had reached Pelistry Bay, where Rachel had camped last year, I was hot, sweaty and footsore. Rachel also was tired and beginning to show signs of sunburn.

We therefore decided to curtail our coastal walk around the island and instead walked inland to Juliet's Tea Garden, visited last year by Rachel and her school group. By the time we gratefully arrived there, I was almost totally exhausted and Rachel was tired and hot too. Alan seemed more or less OK!



A typical scene of wild rocky beauty

In the prettily planted Juliet's Tea Garden, we drank lemonade mixed with ice cream and looked out upon some lovely views. Best of all, we sat underneath sunshades and it was so heavenly that I hoped we would be able to visit again. For the moment, though, we had to complete the last lap of our walk and I did indeed feel as if I was on my last legs. I think we'd underestimated the size of the island and the strength of the sun, but the views had been worth it all.

Once we were back at the flat, we all soaked our poor beleaguered feet and surveyed the blisters and sunburn. Rachel's shoulders looked quite pink, but fortunately we had some After Sun cream, which was applied liberally. I began to feel some after-burn on my face, so applied some cream there too.

We dined simply again, on boiled eggs, salmon and baked potato in various combinations, then all relaxed for a couple of hours by reading books from the flat's small library. Rachel has chosen *September* by Rosamunde Pilcher, Alan has pounced upon *The Russia House* by John Le Carré and I have picked a history mystery called *Midnight is a Lonely Place* by Barbara Erskine. It was a quiet evening and after watching *Wycliffe*, we were happy to take to our beds.

Monday 22nd July

I arose at 08:00 after waking in the night feeling hot. Rachel's shoulders were still sore, she said she'd had to sleep as if she'd been in a coffin! At 10:00 we walked into town, where Rachel went off alone while Alan and I visited the museum. It was small, but interesting and I rather fancied going beachcombing after seeing some of the exhibits found by beachcombers.

Afterwards we popped into a couple of gift shops, the pharmacy for some plasters for our feet, the bakery for some fresh bread and finally the Co-op for some more supplies. It was then back to the flat to join Rachel for a simple lunch of bread, cheese, salmon, salad and a fresh cake from the bakery. Upon browsing through some of the tourist leaflets left at the flat, we decided the afternoon was a perfect opportunity to go for a short, one-hour walk to Star Castle and the Garrison, a fortification around the west side of St Mary's.

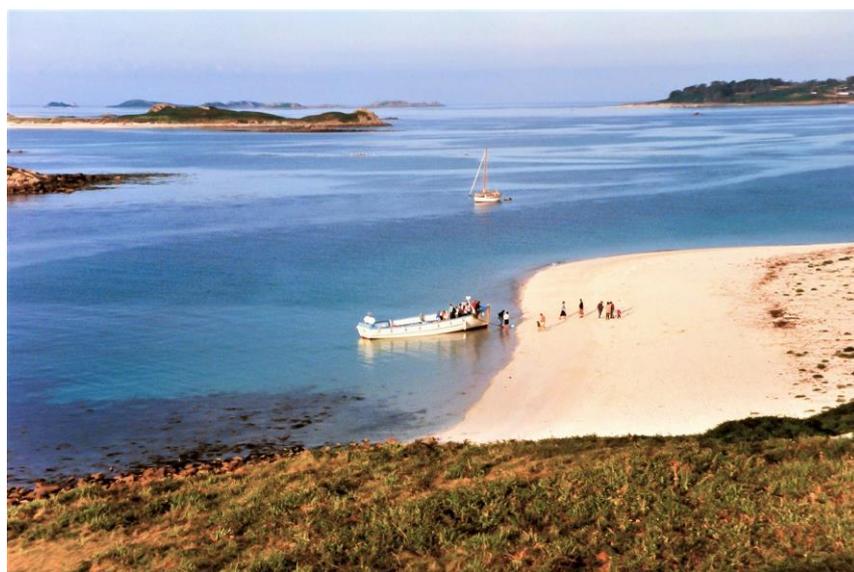
Star Castle was the centre of the Garrison, built in 1593 after the 1588 Spanish Armada attack. The views were great and Rachel was interested because she'd been to the Garrison last year, but it was very hot and we wished there was more shade. We walked around the walls and gun batteries strategically placed at regular intervals, before sitting down for a while to look out to sea.



Rachel leans on a handy cannon at the Garrison

To escape the sun, we headed back to the flat and after a mug of tea and a quiet reading session (we'd all chosen good books) we prepared another simple repast of baked beans on toast. We weren't particularly bothered about food, as we had an evening objective, a boat trip to the uninhabited off-island of Samson.

At 19:00, we embarked on a boat called Golden Spray for a 15-minute voyage into the expansive calm of a beautiful Scilly evening. Rachel confessed to rather fancying the young boatman and in a beneficent maternal way I approved of her taste. The boat rolled a bit, but as we made our way towards Samson's twin peaks, the scenery was superb, with blue sky, rocky outcrops and other islands.



People use Golden Spray's bendy gangplank

When we landed, we all had to walk down a rather bendy gangplank onto the sand, although Rachel seemed personally very happy with this arrangement, because it meant the fanciable boatman was duty-bound to hold out his hand for passengers to grab as they stepped on to the beach. Was it my maternal imagination, or did his gaze linger on her for a few moments?

The beach itself was gorgeous, with lots of fine pale golden sand strewn with numerous interesting-looking shells. We stood and looked around for a while before walking towards the marram grass at the back of the beach, where narrow paths amid heather and other vegetation led in an upwards direction.

We wanted to investigate the prehistoric remains mentioned in Alan's booklet, but they had unfortunately been closed off because of necessary repairs being carried out on the path. Undaunted, however, we climbed onwards and upwards through tufty, springy heather to nearly the top of the island, where we noticed a good vantage point ahead of us that would give a brilliant view of the surrounding sea and forthcoming sunset. Looking down to the beach, Rachel noticed sadly that Golden Spray had disappeared.

On arrival at our vantage point, it was unfortunately clear that we were invading the territory of a lot of nesting seabirds (gulls or terns, perhaps) that began to wheel around in the sky quite near to us, emitting a most raucous noise. As someone with ornithophobia, this was extremely alarming and after Alan had taken a few photos, we moved on to another place, where we wouldn't be disturbing any birds. We sat on some flattish rocks and enjoyed one of the most pleasant hours that I can remember in my entire life so far.



Me plus wine

We'd brought some food and drink with us for a small al fresco supper and I must confess that drinking straight from a bottle of red wine in those wild and wonderful surroundings evoked such a heady sense of freedom in me that it felt like nectar to the soul. Alan and I *were* sharing the bottle! Alan had brought some cider especially for Rachel and we all talked and laughed a lot under the expansive sky, as the sunset began to deepen imperceptibly all around us.



Alan and Rachel

Rachel had espied the return of Golden Spray (complete with the boatman) so she and I walked slowly downwards to the beach, while Alan stayed at the top to take photos as the sky began to turn several shades of orange. We wandered along the sand picking up shells until Alan returned and the boat prepared for the journey back. Once again we had to walk along the bendy gangplank, but soon we were ready to leave Samson behind.

At 21:30, the sky was changing every minute as we pulled away from shore. It was breathtakingly beautiful and I was in danger of developing a stiff neck because I was looking upwards so much. Rachel, on the other hand, was looking inwards at the boatman, whereas Alan was looking through his camera lens.

We landed back on St Mary's feeling as though we'd just spent an idyllic evening – well, I know Alan and I did and I'm pretty sure Rachel enjoyed it a great deal too. We drank some tea, looked at the news and weather on television and then fell very contentedly into bed at around 22:45.

Tuesday 23rd July

I fell out of bed (but not really) at 07:45, having been woken an hour earlier by the sound of wood pigeons, which reminded me of home. I wondered how Daniel was and felt sure he would love it here. There is also a Twisted Willow tree that seems to connect me with home every time I look out of the kitchen window.

However, the plan for today was to catch a boat to Tresco, so after I'd made sandwiches and all of us were ready, we joined the daily throng on their way to the quay, where people were already queuing for tickets for the first trip at 10:00. At the kiosk, Alan bought 12 tickets, which gave us a discount of £6 (£40.80 instead of £46.80) for today's trip and three future trips with any boat belonging to the Boatmen's Association.

It was decidedly sunny when we boarded the first available boat, named Lily of Laguna, at about 09:45, but not all that long after we left at 09:55 with a boat crammed (safely) full of passengers, we espied dark clouds over towards Tresco.

As it happened, we didn't get damp from any rain, but I became uncomfortably wet from sea splashes that several times went all down my back. The lady opposite me said, "You're sitting in the wet seat." She was right, as nobody else seemed nearly as badly afflicted. Alan decided to put on his wet weather jacket anyway, but Rachel and I had neglected to put ours in our bags – oops!

We clambered out of the boat on arrival at Tresco and walked to Cromwell's Castle, a gun tower built unsurprisingly at the instigation of Oliver Cromwell. It was a replacement for King Charles' Castle, built on a promontory to protect the narrow anchorage between Tresco and Bryher. To reach the promontory in question was a bit of an up hill and down dale walk in amongst some narrow bracken/gorse/fern/bramble paths, but as usual the views were very good:



Cromwell's Castle

My t-shirt was still wet from the earlier splashing and had soaked through to my leggings and underclothes, resulting in an annoying water rash, but the weather remained dry and the sky began to brighten. Alan led us up a steep hill to the ruins of King Charles' Castle, which I found quite tiring in my dampened condition. Despite its name, this artillery fort had been built between 1550-1554 during King Edward VI's reign, but was garrisoned by Royalists in the Civil War.

For the next half-hour, we walked to Tresco Abbey Gardens, by which time my clothes had dried out completely. Entrance was £4 each and as soon as we were inside, we found a wooden bench and sat to eat our sandwiches. Some small birds joined us, but they weren't in the slightest aggressive and I even found them quite charming. Maybe the magic of the garden was already working.

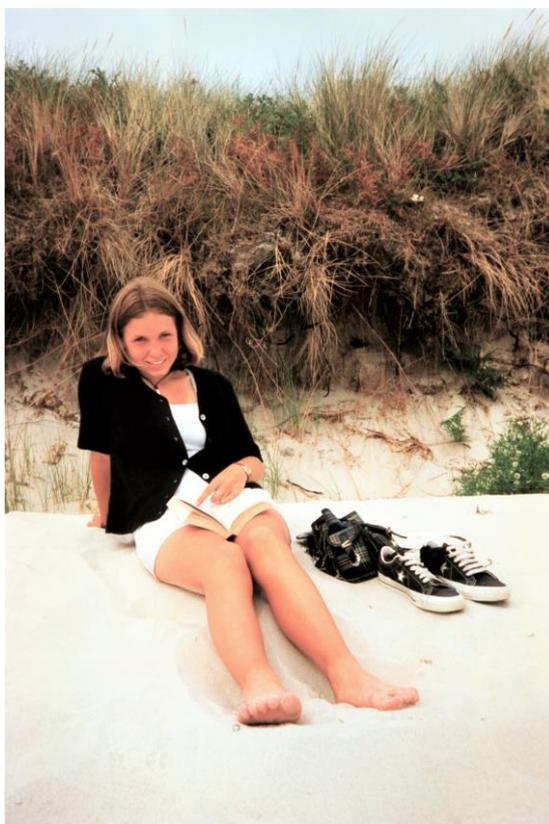
The gardens are named Tresco Abbey Gardens because there had once been a Benedictine abbey there, founded in 964 AD. The ruins we came across today, though, were mostly from the Priory of St Nicholas, founded by monks from Tavistock Abbey in 1114. The gardens had been created by the 19th-century proprietor of Tresco, Augustus Smith, who was also responsible for a collection of figureheads, name boards and decorative carvings from ships wrecked around Scilly. The collection was named Valhalla (old Norse for 'hall of the slain').



The magic of Neptune

Having had our fill of garden delight, Alan and I thought Rachel would appreciate a while on the beach, so we left the gardens and walked along a path next to the helicopter landing pad, where we saw one helicopter land and another take off.

The beach was nearly deserted, which was surprising due to its lovely fine, white sand. I thought how there's no need to travel hundreds of miles abroad when we have such great beaches only a few miles away. Rachel settled down to read *September*, while Alan and I walked barefoot along the sand looking for shells.



Such fine white sand

We found lots of shells, including three cowries, while relishing the wonderful sense of peace there. Later, a few people appeared on the scene (or on the beach to be precise), but it was still remarkably empty. At 15:30 we stirred ourselves and made our way to the pick-up point for the boat that was due at 16:00. There were so many people there by then that two boats came. We got on the second one, called Sea King, but there were still some people standing on the jetty when we left. Obviously another boat would be coming along...

The return journey was thankfully dry! We decided to buy fish and chips for tea, so Alan and I waited for the fish shop in the town to open at 17:00, while Rachel went on to the flat. It was a pleasant change to have a take-away meal, as I was feeling exhausted – fish and chips seemed to be a popular option, as the little shop became quite crowded. We therefore had a quiet evening, with Rachel staying up to watch something on television, while Alan and I went to bed because we couldn't keep our eyes open (I believe it's called middle-age).

Wednesday 24th July

I awoke to the sound of wood pigeons again, which is not ideal, but I suppose there are worse sounds. I proceeded to make some tea, but the milk had gone off, so Alan quite happily walked into the centre at about 08:50 for some fresh supplies. I also asked him to buy some emergency Sellotape – the emergency being that my fringe needs some fierce taming in the morning, because as soon as I step outside the door, all the moist sea air and the sea breezes create an almost instant and utterly ridiculous fly-away effect.

We enjoyed a fairly lazy morning, wherein Alan and I walked to the wholesale shop from which we'd pre-ordered the groceries for our arrival, mainly because we had to pay for them. It was a well-stocked, spacious shop and we also bought more provisions of mostly fruit from there. Meanwhile, Rachel walked into the centre by herself to buy a couple of items and we later converged at the flat for a cup of coffee, followed a short while later by a simple lunch.

The weather had been cooler in the morning, but by the afternoon it had become hot once again as we set out for a walk. First of all we stopped at a 'pottery' that was actually a very large room where the potter sat next to a display of all his wares. Alan bought Rachel an owl and he was very taken with a leaping dolphin, but decided not to plunge, or leap, or whatever.

Our next call was at a painting 'gallery' that was again basically just a room in a house. It was rather a small room and unfortunately Alan caught a pile of glass frames that were stacked on the floor with his sandal and one of the frames broke. He apologised profusely and offered to pay, but the man said it was his fault for leaving them stacked there. It *was* his fault, to be honest, but it was still rather an awful few moments (especially for Alan).

We then carried on walking until we came across a place called Longstone Heritage Centre, where we paid a small fee to see a display of island history. It was really quite interesting, particularly about the hundreds of shipwrecks in the area. Other subjects included the development of bulb growing, the islands during the two World Wars and notable storms, to name but a few. It was well worth the entrance fee and there was hardly anybody else there all the time we were inside, so we didn't feel at all rushed.

At the same place there was an 18-hole putting green outside so we decided to have a friendly game. Putting holds happy memories for me, as my parents and I often played it when I was a child, so it therefore felt special for us to play it with Rachel. I only wish Daniel could have been there too, but the three of us spent a most enjoyable hour or so and Alan even managed a hole in one. It was unfortunately the wrong hole, but we'll gloss over that. He beat Rachel and me, but we all had a jolly old laugh (usually at each other).



Rachel in action

We then strolled back in the heat of the afternoon. Rachel returned to the flat, while Alan and I went into the centre to post postcards. Alan enquired in one shop about indigenous rocks and was told his best bet was to look on the beach on a falling tide. That sounds a very good idea and somehow endearingly Scilly. Tea was simple as usual, with various combinations of egg, salmon and cheese, which seem to be our staple diet here.

At 19:15 Alan and I took advantage of the still lovely evening and went for a walk to Penninis Head. The metal tower lighthouse there had been built in 1911 as a replacement for the lighthouse of 1680 on the island of St Agnes. It stands at 14 metres high and in 1992 was converted from acetylene gas to electricity. Pulpit Rock was also there – actually, it had been there when we'd walked past it on our first long walk on Sunday, but I didn't know what it was called then.

We took a few photos, looked at the view, had a drink of water and then walked back to the flat to spend the rest of the evening with Rachel. Television was absolutely hopeless, so we all read our books. *Midnight is a Lonely Place* is scary but wonderful, I'm so glad I've discovered Barbara Erskine.

Thursday 25th July

The day of Alan's brother Douglas's Scilly adventure! Although some roofs seemed to be wet, there was sunshine when we woke, which was good news. After a mug of tea in bed, Alan walked to the centre for some fresh milk and other supplies – he said he rather likes being able to do this, seeing the 'centre' is so close. We spent the morning pottering and reading while waiting until it was time to go and meet Douglas from the daily ferry from the mainland, the famous Scillonian III (famous for being known as 'the sick ship' in bad weather).

Thankfully, the weather was still good when we left the flat and walked to the quay. We were a little early because the ferry didn't arrive until almost midday, but it's always interesting at the quayside, watching all the activity of boats and people. It was quite exciting to watch the ferry approach and berth, finally catching sight of Douglas walking nonchalantly down the gangplank. We said hello and then strolled along to The Bishop and Wolf pub for lunch.

It was a very pleasant pub and we sat upstairs where it wasn't at all crowded. Alan and Douglas chose a fish called megrim that I'd never heard of before, while I chose plaice and Rachel ended up with a double portion of spare ribs (Douglas made the double decision for her). The plaice was good, although I'm a fish wimp and prefer to eat fish that has no visible signs it was once a wild and free creature swimming around innocently in the sea.

It was just after 13:00 when we left the pub and slowly meandered along, stopping at an ice cream shop for one of their differently flavoured ice creams. Once out of the centre, the route we took was somewhat hot and dusty, then just plain hot as we walked along country lanes, eventually reaching the place where Marconi first received radio transmissions from Porthcurno in Cornwall.



Hot and dusty (the route and us)

We decided to visit Juliet's Tea Garden with its lovely view overlooking Hugh Town (I was beginning to get used to the location of places). I was desperately hot by the time we arrived and sought the welcome respite of a sunshade, although Douglas said he loves the heat and sat out in the full sun.

The first time we'd been in Juliet's Tea Garden, we'd been overcharged, although it had been easily sorted out, with apologies. This time the girl only brought two of the drinks we'd ordered and Alan had to go and ask for the other two. She thought she'd already brought them. Perhaps it will be third time lucky?

We continued our walk back to Hugh Town, stopping en route at a 'perfumery' that was one room and an artist's studio. I have to admit I feel very conspicuous and uncomfortable in these small places with the artist present. We also stopped at Harry's Walls, the remains of an unfinished 16th-century fort that had started being built in 1551 (during the reign of Edward VI) to counter the threat of attack from France. It had been realised during construction, however, that the site was unsuitable and building ceased.

From Harry's Walls, we could see the Scillonian III waiting patiently in the harbour. Douglas said he wished that he didn't have to sail back on it to the mainland, so to delay the inevitable for as long as possible, Alan suggested we call by at the flat for some tea. However, time elapsed as time does and we eventually walked to the harbour to say goodbye to Douglas, who boarded the ferry with a wistful smile and a wave at 16:15.

Alan, Rachel and I then wandered around a few gift shops and another studio/gallery that turned out to be very expensive, until we were tired and returned to the flat for a very simple tea. As it was another lovely evening and it felt utterly wrong to waste it, Alan and I walked to a nearby beach and looked for indigenous rocks. I can't say we were successful (because we weren't), but we enjoyed collecting some lovely little shells. I seem to be collecting shells from every island, so it's three down and three to go!



Alan in the evening sun

On returning to the flat at around 20:00, Rachel had finished the jigsaw for the third time and had also finished reading *September*. As there was sadly no *October*, she picked out a horror story to read next from the flat's supply of literature. A quiet evening then ensued, reading and watching some television. The weather forecast unfortunately mentioned the possibility of rain tomorrow.

Friday 26th July

I got out of bed at 07:30 to look at the weather and it was quite misty, so much so that I couldn't make out the island of Samson we can normally see across the bay. It was still more or less the same when we were ready for an outing, so we decided to have a walk on St Mary's rather than chance visiting another island.

Once we'd started walking at about 10:00, we realised how hot and clammy it was, as Alan and Rachel were wearing jeans and I was hot enough in shorts. On this walk, we stopped at some prehistoric places mentioned in Alan's booklet, firstly the Bronze Age entrance grave of Bant's Carn on the crest of a hill.



Bant's Carn

It was quite an impressive burial chamber, although when it had been excavated in 1900, it had disappointingly been almost empty apart from some piles of cremated human bones and a few fragments of decorated pottery.



Rachel at Halangy Down

Just below were the remains of the Iron Age village of Halangy Down, which had obviously used a system of terracing down the fairly steep slope overlooking the sea. We stayed for a while to rest and gaze seaward, as the mist had eventually lifted. After a welcome drink, we continued along some dusty and humid coastal paths, beginning to perspire as it approached midday.

We stopped to take photos at two Bronze Age burial chambers, Lower Innisidgen and Upper Innisidgen. The latter is one of the best-preserved entrance graves on the Isles of Scilly, while the former is damaged, with only two of its capstones.



Lower Innisidgen



Upper Innisidgen

As soon as we came across a wooden bench upon which a fortuitous sea breeze was in evidence, we sat down on it gratefully and ate our cheese and cucumber sandwiches, before walking onwards to Pelistry Bay. Rachel said it didn't feel the same with us there and not her friends – the forthrightness of the young!

We sat on a rock for a while to rest and then decided to head back to the flat, as heat and tiredness were overtaking us in varying degrees. We stopped for an ice cream on the way back and although I was handed a chocolate one instead of the coffee one I'd asked for, I didn't mind at all, because it was beautifully cold. After the delicious coldness, we returned to the flat and heated ourselves again with a mug of tea. Rachel's shoulders have started to peel and so has my nose.

After a tea of mostly baked beans and baked potatoes, Alan and I decided to walk to the town (which Rachel rightly says is more like a village) to post postcards and buy chocolate. The weather wasn't great, so we didn't linger. Back at the flat, we watched television and ate Maltesers, as our window view of Samson opposite kept disappearing and reappearing in the mist. The weather forecast for the weekend is a bit on the dodgy side.

Saturday 27th July

The weather forecast is not always right! Alan got up at 08:00 and decided a boat trip was a good move, as it was fairly sunny. He therefore walked to the Co-op for their opening time of 08:30, while Rachel and I got ready. By 09:25 we had joined the daily surge of many people heading towards the quay.

We'd decided to visit St Agnes and the boat we were helped on by a courteous boatman was called Buccaneer. The 15-minute voyage over to St Agnes was bumpier compared to the previous two trips and Alan said the boat was corkscrewing a bit. I decided that I wouldn't be taking up sailing as a hobby, although this is no new decision – or a relevant one, come to that. Rachel said she enjoyed the trip, as she was listening to a German man who was talking practically non-stop. Be that as it may, I was glad to disembark on St Agnes.

Adjoined to this island by a sand bar is another small island known as Gugh. As the tide was low and outgoing, we decided to walk to Gugh and began a search for ancient sites there (according to Alan's booklet, naturally), but only managed to find one. This was a menhir or standing stone, leaning over precariously in the middle of the path and endearingly called The Old Man of Gugh.



The Old Man of Gugh (the menhir)

Gugh appeared to be mostly wild and deserted, covered with much heather and bracken. There were a great many birds there that were probably mostly gulls – and nesting gulls at that, if their intimidating cries and threatening wheeling around in the air as we approached were anything to go by.

There were also so many feathers on the ground that I felt quite uncomfortable (because my ornithophobia ridiculously includes feathers), but I kept telling myself that I was doing feather therapy by facing my fear. I tried very hard to concentrate on the really good sea views as we walked, as well as appreciating the fact that although the sun was out, it wasn't nearly as hot and oppressive as the day before. It was an interesting walk...

We failed to find the grave of somebody ancient, although I must say I wasn't particularly bothered, as it was simply good to be out in the open air. We made our way back to the sand bar and strolled across to St Agnes, where we sat on the beach to eat pink salmon sandwiches and drink orange squash. Rachel seemed to become somewhat bored, although she said she was fine.

We left the beach and walked upwards to investigate St Agnes, but there wasn't much we came across except a couple of tea gardens, a post office, a disused lighthouse, a camp site and rather good views of interesting rocky islets, including the one on which the Bishop Rock lighthouse stands. At the post office, we went inside to buy a cold Strawberry Split, although Rachel declined.



The lighthouse

There was nothing much else to do except return to the beach and while away the time until the return boat was due to arrive. Rachel relaxed in the sun, while Alan and I wandered around the area looking for shells and indigenous rocks. There weren't all that many shells, but we noticed a fair number of interesting rocks and pebbles (far too big to take home, though).

The incoming tide gradually covered the sand bar completely, making Gugh truly an island again. We were surprised to see a few people still wading across, as if they didn't even consider danger of death by drowning – I'd be far too scared.

Our time on the beach had been very agreeable, but at about 15:15 we started to make tracks towards where we would be catching the scheduled 15:45 boat back to St Mary's. As it happened, it didn't actually leave until 16:00, due to a bigger boat, The Spirit of St Agnes, being in the way.

The journey back wasn't quite as bumpy as the journey out and we were soon walking along the quay of St Mary's. We called in at the Co-op and were quite excited to find some microwave meals, as we'd become rather tired of eggs, cheese and pink salmon. For our evening meal later, Alan and I had a vegetable curry, while Rachel had Hot and Spicy Chinese Chicken. We then stayed in for the evening and relaxed, after a few domestic chores like washing a few clothes (me) and vacuuming a sandy, crumbly floor (Alan).

The sun tan report is as follows: Rachel's chest varies intriguingly from white to pink to brown. Her shoulders are pink (peeled) and brown. Today, her legs are very pink down the front with a sudden sock mark. Alan's arms and legs are slightly pink veering towards brown, and my knees are shining like red beacons. My nose has more or less stopped peeling, but my neck is now red. We're quite a sight – and it's not as if we haven't been using any sun screen. Obviously we don't put it on the right places at the right times.

I am now reading a rather strange novel called *The House of Vandekar* by Evelyn Anthony, Alan is reading a small Le Carré novel and Rachel is still reading the horror story. This evening she took an impressive one hour and five minutes to complete the 350-piece jigsaw for the fourth time!

Sunday 28th July

Nobody stirred until 08:45 this morning and then it was me, to make some tea. The day started off with sun, but clouded over a little, with even some splashes of rain on the window. We all seemed in the mood to have a very lazy morning.

However, Alan and I did venture forth at 11:15 for a walk. There was a wood carving place that should have been open, but it was shut, so we walked on to the lifeboat station and looked out across the harbour and the other islands of Samson, Bryher and Tresco. There was a passing shower of rain, but it passed, as passing showers do. To be honest, I was happy to have the time to stand and stare for a while, although we did attempt to sit on a seat that wasn't wet.

We returned to the flat for a sandwich lunch at midday, then Alan and I decided to go for a walk to a house near the Marconi tower, where we'd seen a notice advertising belladonna lily bulbs for sale at 3 for £1 the last time we'd walked by on Friday. The fact that we'd seen some during this morning's walk for sale at £1.75 each may have motivated us slightly.

The weather was somewhat oppressive as we walked along the roads/lanes and as we reached Marconi's Tower, dark rain clouds were sweeping in from the direction of Bryher and Tresco. We steamed ahead to the bulb place, which was a box outside somebody's house with a plastic Flora tub saying 'Please leave money here – thank you.' Grabbing three bags of bulbs and leaving £3 in the tub, we retraced our steps as quickly as possible back to the flat, working up quite a sweat in the process. It was worth it, because as we sat drinking tea a while later, it poured. Samson across the bay was totally obliterated by the rain.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in pure relaxation by reading our books. Alan is now well ensconced in a Frederick Forsyth novel and Rachel's most recent purchase is a book set in the Isles of Scilly called *Why the Whales Came* by Michael Morpurgo. I have been noticing a couple of intriguing looking novels set in the Isles of Scilly and am sorely tempted to purchase one or two, particularly *Hell Bay* (which is an actual place located at Bryher) by Sam Llewellyn, simply because I love the title.

Rachel's shoulders are still peeling in a bizarre way, she said very descriptively that it looks as if her shoulder bones are trying to poke through! My nose annoyingly appears not to have stopped peeling after all and this morning my forehead decided to join in the skin flaking fest. Last night Alan very kindly informed me that my face was glowing in the dark – not to mention my knees, of course, so today it was a relief not to have to worry about the sun at all.

Tea was more or less odd bits and pieces of food, with Rachel opting for her second Hot and Spicy Chinese Chicken (I like the name, it just rolls off the tongue). We seemed contentedly relaxed in the evening and very happy to sit and read or watch television, though not at exactly the same time. Hopefully, the weather will be good enough to venture forth on a boat trip tomorrow.

Monday 29th July

I spent a restless night, feeling hot and nauseous for the first half of it, but slept well enough in the second half. I still wasn't feeling exactly great when we arose at about 08:00 for breakfast, but decided a boat trip was still a good idea, as the weather was fair. Alan therefore departed for his early morning trip to the Co-op to buy fresh milk, as it had gone off again. It seems rather a problem here.

We were ready to leave at 09:30 and walked to the quay, slightly dismayed to discover there was a fine, misty drizzle. Alan voiced doubts about going after all, but we carried on walking and by 09:50 were sitting in the boat called Guiding Star, which left at 10:10 for Bryher. During the waiting time in the boat we'd put on our wet weather jackets, put our hoods up, taken them down and eventually taken our wet weather jackets off again. The weather wouldn't make up its mind, but the sea was smoother than it had been on our trip to St Agnes.

The sea might have been smooth, but there was a bit of excitement when we were approaching Bryher and the skipper informed us we'd all have to take off our shoes and socks to go ashore in a small dinghy that was trailing behind the boat. The reason for this was that the tide was too low to land at the quay. I'd actually noticed the dinghy earlier but had thought nothing of it. I wondered if the skipper was kidding at first, because he was a jokey sort of chap, but when he told us to pretend we were at Dunkirk, I realised he was deadly serious.

We therefore had no choice but to clamber from the safety of the boat onto the dinghy. I somehow managed to manoeuvre quite awkwardly and ended up sitting on the edge of the boat, having to slide very ungraciously on my behind down into the dinghy. It didn't help that I had my rucksack on my back, I was holding my trainers in one hand and I don't have very long legs anyway! That was only the first part of the exercise, of course, as when we were close enough to the shore, we had to clamber out of the dinghy and wade through the shallow water on to the beach. Rachel's jeans got rather wet...



Not exactly Dunkirk, but an amphibious landing

The beach was reached without any further incident, although we and the other unsuspecting passengers of *Guiding Star* looked a bit as if we'd made land safely after a shipwreck. We then attempted to dry off as much as we could, before setting out to find some prehistoric sites that were mentioned in Alan's booklet.

We never actually found them, as the paths were full of gorse and so overgrown that they appeared to be dead-ends anyway. It also started to rain again slightly, so the best idea seemed simply to walk around the island and enjoy the views, which were indeed fabulous, with so many tiny islands and rocks.



Enjoying the views

We walked to Hell Bay that looked quite un-hellish in daylight, especially as the rain had stopped again, but I could imagine how wild seas crashing onto rocks on a stormy night would enable the bay to live up to its name. I just had to buy that book, but for now we sat on the cliff above Hell Bay and ate our lunch.



Hell Bay

In due course it was time to move on, so we continued our scenic walk around the island, next stopping at a point that gave us a very good view of Cromwell's Castle on nearby Tresco (far top left and unfortunately hazy in the photo), where Rachel obligingly posed for us on the edge of a rock. Talking of time, Rachel's watch had stopped and she seemed to keep asking me what the time was every five minutes or so – it's funny what sticks in your memory:



Rachel poses (with a stopped watch)

Further along, we stopped for another rest and sat by a rock for 20 minutes or so, peacefully looking out over Tresco and the quay at Bryher, watching the activity of boats and people down below. We then descended from our lofty position and walked on to the interestingly named Fraggie Rock Café (licensed). Alan decided to take advantage of the fact that he wasn't driving for once and enjoyed a pint of ice-cold Tetley's, while Rachel and I did our best to smile and pretend we were enjoying a rather warm Diet Coke.

It had become hot once again and as we made another ascent through gorse and bracken to a look-out point imaginatively named Watch Hill, we began to perspire. The view at the top was definitely worth the exertion, but to our surprise there was a man standing at the look-out point with a telescope, peering through it in all directions as if he belonged in a Victorian adventure novel. We were sure he was local, because he somehow looked so intrinsically 'Scilly' – so much so that after asking permission, Alan took a photo of him.



The watchman

By this time, we were all becoming somewhat desperate to locate a toilet, so we walked down to the quay specifically for that purpose. As there was still some time to spare afterwards, we tried to ascend to another point from which there would be a good view, but whatever path we chose ended either in impassable gorse bushes or three goats grazing on the hillside.

Not entirely reluctantly, we gave up the idea of a further ascent and took the much easier option of going down to the small beach by the quay. Once there, Rachel lay in the sun, while Alan and I paddled our feet and looked for shells.

At about 16:20, Guiding Star made an appearance. It was actually due to leave Bryher at 16:45, but had come early to pick up a few people from Samson as well (another boat arrived at Bryher to pick up the remaining people at 16:45). It feels quite comforting to know that the Association boatmen are very well organised and keep in good radio contact with one another.

The distance between Bryher and Samson is really quite small, but after we'd picked up the few people from Samson and were under way again, there was definitely more of a swell. I have to confess that it frightens me and I'm always very glad to be back safely once more on dry land.

Once we were safely back on the dry land of the quayside, we walked to the flat feeling tired and happy, as if we'd had a good day out. This was definitely the case, so it seemed pertinent to stop off at the Co-op for some wine and cider, in order to end our enjoyable day with another relaxing evening chez nous.

Tuesday 30th July

We all slept very well last night and didn't move until 09:00, when I got up to make some tea. We also lingered over breakfast, as there seemed no point in hurrying. Obviously the holiday relaxation was working well, but by 10:30 we'd stirred ourselves enough for Alan and me to walk to a pottery near the Garrison, stopping en route to draw out some money. We discovered that St Mary's only has Lloyds and Barclays banks, both of which wanted to charge us for a cash withdrawal, although the girl at Barclays helpfully informed us that the Co-op operates a cashback system up to £50. Problem solved.

The pottery was very small and I felt rather claustrophobic and uncomfortable walking out without buying anything (although we nearly bought a small green vase until we noticed the glazing was bumpy on the bottom). At the Co-op we took advantage of the cashback system and I finally bought the *Hell Bay* book I'd been hankering after for days. Success!

Not far from the flat was a woodcarving place that turned out to be someone's house. A 9- or 10-year-old boy came to the door and started to talk rather crazily about heaven knows what. To be honest, he seemed hyperactive and although he may have been talking about woodcarvings, I stayed outside while Alan went inside to look at what he later said were mostly boats. I'm simply not made for close potential commercial encounters with strangers.

After popping in at the wholesale food place (with no encroachment on personal space) we returned to the flat and consumed salmon sandwiches, fruit and a mug of tea. The three of us then went out for a short walk to Old Town, where we discovered there isn't even a shop, just a café – quaint!

I began to wonder if I was missing civilisation a little as we walked further on and Alan popped into two art studios/galleries. Rachel went into one with him, but I'd had enough and stayed outside, feeling like a bit of an idiot. I therefore went into the next place we came across, which happened to be a pottery and where Alan happened to buy me a cat (pottery!)

After that, we returned to the flat for a drink and the toilet and then walked into the centre, because Rachel and I wanted to buy some more postcards. Rachel then went back to the flat while Alan and I made a slight detour to the beach and meandered up to the flat the back way via the Watch Tower (although not in the Jehovah Witness sense).

A relaxing reading session followed, complete with mugs of tea. I am now in the middle of reading *Why the Whales Came*, which is a story set on Bryher and quite excitingly mentions Hell Bay, as well as the island of Samson. A children's book it might be, but I am really enjoying it.

Rachel chose another Hot and Spicy Chicken for tea, while Alan and I plumped for pizza. By 18:00 it had started to rain and Samson over the way/bay all but disappeared from view. We therefore spent another evening reading and watching television. I have no proper idea why, but for some reason the magic disappeared for me today. I must pull myself together and make the most of our time here at this very special place. We went to bed early tonight, after looking at the weather forecast, which is very important when boat trips are planned!

Wednesday 31st July

I couldn't get to sleep for ages last night, thinking how ridiculous I am to be anxious about boat trips, plane flights and going into small shops (galleries, potteries, whatever) while on holiday. I managed to sleep eventually, to be greeted on waking at 07:50 by a sunny morning. It was actually a sunny interval, as there were many clouds in the sky, but that didn't deter us from preparing to make our final boat trip to St Martin's, the most westerly island.

As we approached the quay at around 09:40, Rachel was delighted to discover that the boat assigned to St Martin's was Golden Spray (complete with the fit boatman). It was a good job we were there in plenty of time, because the boat filled up very quickly and we left early at 10:10. The trip took 30 minutes instead of the usual 15 minutes, but Rachel didn't mind! Neither did I, as the sea was calm. The weather was cloudy, warm and really very pleasant.

Once on St Martin's, we walked from Lower Town to Higher Town. There is apparently also a Middle Town, although to be honest I didn't really notice that we were walking past any towns. Rachel and I decided to accompany Alan up a hill to look for three cairns mentioned in his booklet, but although the view was good, the bramble and gorse overgrown path up there wasn't. Rachel and I stayed put at one point while Alan went onwards to take a photo.

We had to brave gorse and brambles again to descend the hill, but then stepped gratefully onto the beach, where the tide was out. Although the boat had landed us at Lower Town, the return boat would be picking us up at Higher Town, near where we currently were. Alan wanted to find some standing stones mentioned in his booklet, but after asking some local people, he discovered that only two stones were visible, the others having been covered over by sand. We found the stones, Alan took photos and we sat in a secluded spot to eat our sandwiches.

We walked up to the very visible daymark that had been built on a headland facing west in 1683, rather than 1637 as carved above its doorway. Rachel had already visited this rendered granite circular tower on her school trip last year.



The daymark

Its diameter remains at 16 feet (4.8 metres) until it reaches 21ft (6.4m), at which point it decreases in diameter to a conical point ending at 36ft (11m). It had been painted white in 1822, but by 1833 was changed to red. Today it was standing proudly banded in both red and white paint, quietly famous as the earliest surviving example of a beacon in Britain.

Alan and I then went for a walk, while Rachel stayed on the beach. The view was magnificent – we could even see mainland Cornwall in the distance, although of course the Isles of Scilly have belonged to the Duchy of Cornwall since its foundation in the 14th century. After taking in this uplifting scenery, we slowly walked back along a sandy path to the beach and rejoined Rachel.



On the beach

After sitting on the sand and reading our books for a while, Alan and I became slightly restless, so went for a stroll to look for shells, pebbles and indigenous rocks. There weren't many shells, but plenty of rocks and pebbles. Alan found a pebble with a vein of amethyst, so he was pleased.

We'd been told that pick-up time would be between 15:30 and 16:45, but at just gone 15:00 we happened to look across to the jetty and noticed Golden Spray there, already picking up some people. Alan and I walked quickly back to Rachel, knowing she would want to catch that particular boat with its particular boatman. However, we decided that rather than attempting an undignified and frenzied rush to the boat, we would simply wait to see if Golden Spray would drop its passengers at St Mary's before returning to St Martin's. While we waited, other boats from St Mary's arrived to pick up people.

At 16:15, we were preparing to leave anyway when Golden Spray reappeared. We managed to arrive at the jetty in perfect time, as one boat load of people left and Golden Spray tied up alongside to take on more passengers. The things we do for Rachel (although it had been ever so slightly exciting and ended with a quietly pleased daughter!) There was more of a swell for the second half of the journey and we also seemed to catch some of the bow wave of Scillonian III that we passed as it made its way back to the mainland.

We landed on St Mary's at 17:00 and on our way back to the flat, called at the fish shop, where Rachel ordered chicken, Alan ordered fish and I ordered two sausages – we were all hungry! A quiet evening ensued. Despite today's cloud cover, Rachel's back and the back of her legs have caught the sun, while Alan and I have red front legs. It's obviously necessary to put sun screen all over your body several times a day in order to avoid Scilly redness.

Thursday 1st August

This morning started rather later than usual for us, as I think we were pleasantly tired after yesterday's excursion. I arose to make some tea at 08:50 and thereafter Alan went out to buy fresh bread and came back with doughnuts as well. He really seems to like bakeries...

We had a leisurely breakfast, followed quite closely by mid-morning coffee. Alan and I decided to walk down the road to investigate a very small gift shop we'd noticed, where a miniature wooden lighthouse was purchased. Following that, we ventured into a gallery selling stained glass items. We happened to be the only ones in the gallery (eek!) but it was large and *Wannabe* by the Spice Girls was playing on the radio, so for some reason I felt OK. We bought a rather unusual stained-glass holder for shells and called in at the wholesale food shop before returning to the flat for a sandwich lunch.

Afterwards, the three of us went for a walk up to Marconi's Tower and along the only part of the cliff path we hadn't traversed before. It was hot and the sky was very blue, but the walk wasn't all that long and Alan decided to go on to the Garrison. Rachel opted to go back to the flat and she also declined an ice cream, but Alan and I indulged in one while sitting on a seat looking out over the harbour. At the Garrison, the gun placements Alan wanted to see weren't up to much, but the view of St Agnes and Gugh from one of them was great. In fact, the wonderful views alone have really made this holiday very special.

We returned to the flat and enjoyed yet another reading session – all three of us have now read *Midnight is a Lonely Place* and we all want to read more Barbara Erskine books. *Hell Bay* by Sam Llewellyn is excellent and I have also purchased *The Blue Cloak* by Barbara Simpson to supply me with Scilly romance and intrigue when I am home. Talking of home, I've found myself wondering so many times how Daniel is during our stay here and whether he's actually missed us? I wish he could have visited us, I'm positive he'd love the islands.

We took it upon ourselves to start using up some odds and ends for tea, so eggs and baked beans were on the menu. There was one horrendous shower of rain, but after that the evening was calm and lovely. Alan and I decided to walk to the Watch Tower, as the sunset looked very promising.

Nobody else was there when we arrived, but after a short while several camera enthusiasts gradually appeared, so it's obviously a popular vantage point for sunsets. At one stage, the sky looked definitely colourful and interesting, but as the sun sank lower, it disappeared behind some cloud and just fizzled out (not in actuality, of course). The camera enthusiasts left...

We returned to the flat and watched the news and weather on television before bedtime. It's really hard to believe that there are only two more nights to go.

Friday 2nd August

There was a lot of door banging this morning, which woke us up, but we still had another lazy start. The weather was cloudy, but was slowly brightening. We stopped in for a mug of coffee before leaving at around 11:00 to stroll to the town. We'd previously noticed that on the quay was a place that appeared to be called Rat Island with a shop that sold canvas items, so for old times' sake we bought Daniel a small 'ratbag', which had been one of his baby nicknames.



The Scillonian III

We looked in some other shops, panicking slightly about souvenirs, because the choice was a little limited and quite a lot of stock is from the mainland anyway. In the end, we had to plump for various bits and pieces and hope for the best.

It was then time to go back to the flat for salmon sandwiches/salad and I must say it's been most convenient staying in accommodation so close to the centre, which you have to walk through to reach the quay anyway. After lunch, we returned to the centre for a couple of items, then Rachel left us for a sortie of her own. Alan and I walked to Rat Island for Alan to take a photo of Star Castle at the Garrison before walking back through the centre on to the beach.

It was very pleasant on the beach, but so hot when the sun shone through the clouds that I personally preferred the cloud cover. We left at about 15:30 and were walking back when Rachel caught us up and suggested an ice cream. We needed no persuading, so went to the shop that sells flavoured ice cream and ate them on a bench overlooking the harbour. However, when two seagulls began to screech very loudly near us having an argument (the seagulls, not us) and nearly dropping a large feather in my lap, I thought it was time to depart.

The joys of self-catering almost overcame us when we really had to use up all our odds and ends of food for tea. Afterwards Alan did a lot of packing, while I cleared up in the kitchen area. Alan also did some vacuuming, I continued to tidy and we both became incredibly hot and more than a little crabby.

It was a lovely evening, so after watching *Top of the Pops*, we all went for a walk up by the Garrison. To our surprise we came across a crowd of people and realised they must be watching one of the famous Isles of Scilly gig races.

We naturally watched too and it was really quite exciting with lots of other boats on the water alongside them, cheering them on. We recognised several of the Association boats, including Rachel's favourite, Golden Spray. At the finish, there was a crescendo of clapping and cheering – the gig named Nornour won.



The gig race

Feeling pleased we had witnessed another aspect of Scilly life (although not now pleased with this photo), we made our way back to the flat. The sun was a big red ball gradually descending in the sky over Samson – a magical evening.

Saturday 3rd August

The day of our return, but Alan and I had slept somewhat fitfully. Alan wasn't at all anxious about the forthcoming flight, but I most ridiculously was. Rachel said she was looking forward to it! I made some tea at 07:30 and then the great having breakfast, getting ready and clearing everything up exercise began. It was a hot sunny day under a cloudless sky, like it had been on arrival day.

At 09:30 we were all sorted, so we left our bags in the hallway as previously arranged and relinquished accommodation of the Bylet, suite C. It felt strange to be homeless for a while, but we walked happily enough to Old Town beach and then along the path to the end of the airport runway, overlooking the sea.

There was a prehistoric fort there that Alan had somehow missed on our first walk, so we investigated thoroughly and then managed to find some shelter in the shade of a big rock, where we could watch the aircraft come and go.

At around midday we ate our cheese/salmon sandwiches, plus various bits and pieces of food. Despite the forthcoming flight, it was a most enjoyable couple of hours by the rock and fun trying to take photos of the planes as they took off.



A plane spotter

However, we couldn't stay there forever, so slowly ambled back to the town centre and sat on a seat overlooking the harbour, watching all the activity. I began to feel as though I would really miss St Mary's quayside and the peaceful two weeks we'd enjoyed in such beautiful surroundings.

At 14:00, we gave in and bought the final ice cream of the holiday. It was so swelteringly hot sitting there, though, that I became overheated and we took shelter inside the cool interior of the lifeboat station that was thankfully nearby. After looking around, we walked back to the garden of the Bylet, from where we would be collected and transported to the airport. The time was drawing near...



Swelteringly hot

The landlady came and had a friendly chat with us and right on schedule at 17:00, the Skybus taxi service minibus appeared to collect us and our bags. It picked up some other passengers afterwards, some of them on the quay, so Rachel had an unexpected last glimpse of Golden Spray. However, we were then driven to the airport, where I had to face my fear again.

Our flight was late taking off, which didn't exactly help. It was only a 20-minute delay, but they were the longest 20 minutes of the entire holiday. We were seated differently this time, with Rachel directly behind the pilot, beside a woman in her early 20s. Alan and I were behind them and although I could see out of the window, I had to crane forward a little to do so. It didn't really matter, as my eyes were mostly glued to my watch anyway.

To say I was relieved to see Land's End is a complete understatement, but touchdown was a little smoother than our arrival at St Mary's had been. I jumped out of the plane so quickly that I bruised my leg quite painfully on something – but I didn't care, I was alive! It felt strange to be in our car again, although the thought of arriving at Saltash and finding out how Daniel had fared was very appealing. The drive home was tedious and we were all suffering from a headache to varying degrees, but we arrived safely.

I think all three of us brought back many happy memories from the very special Isles of Scilly, with their exposed granite headlands, beautiful sandy coves, prehistoric moorland sites and ubiquitous bulb fields. It's such a relaxing place that seems to emanate a spirit all of its own simply by being itself, which promotes almost instant wellbeing. Many times after we returned home, Alan and I would gaze out to sea in a south-westerly direction, longing to be once again on those uncomplicated shores.

We did, in fact, return in 1999 and 2004 to benefit again from the wonderful sense of life-enhancing peace we'd originally found there. Each time was slightly different, but just as enjoyable. I'd really like to go there again...

*

PS: The photos are from pre-digital days and the quality of them is dubious to say the least. They range from the just about bearable to the really rather atrocious – so all I can do is apologise and hope you have a good imagination 😊