

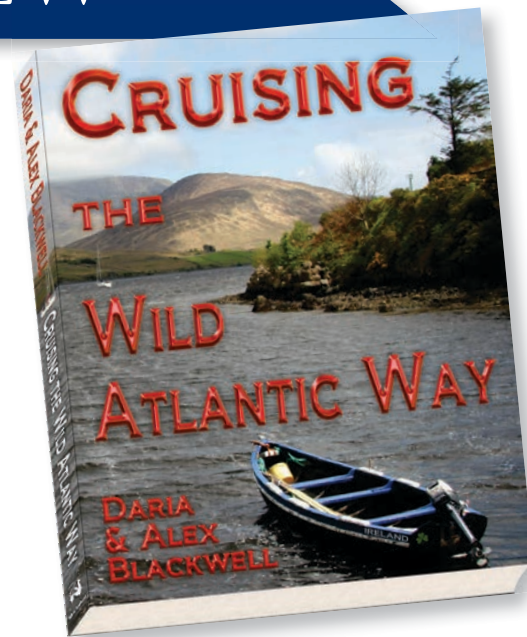


BOOK REVIEW

CRUISING THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

By Daria and Alex Blackwell, ICC, OCC, RYA

Review by Douglas Cole, PNW



AS EXPERIENCED CRUISERS, who among us have said of a cruising guide, “Isn’t this one the best!” or worse, “I could do a better job myself!” Whatever their motivation, lifelong Irish sailors Daria and Alex Blackwell have written a guide to their home waters expressing the former sentiment. It’s a wonderful guidebook.

The guide begins with a seductive invitation: “There are few places on this earth that are more beautiful, more wild, or more remote than the West of Ireland. The cliffs are forbidding. The harbors are at times inhospitable. In essence, the remoteness and inaccessibility of Ireland’s rugged west coast, as well as its wild weather, have been its salvation. There are historical treasures and vibrant marine life. This is why the Wild Atlantic Way is of great interest: Untamed, Adventurous and Unspoiled.” If that isn’t a beguiling come-on to blue water sailors then so be it. I had a chance to cruise the lower portion of where this book takes us and can attest firsthand to the accuracy of their sentiment.

The layout of the guide is ideal. The first part covers a general overview of Ireland’s west coast, including history (a terrific 12,000 year summary in only three pages), bird and sea life, weather (“Being tremendously variable, weather is the most common topic of discussion and the start of every meaningful conversation in Ireland”), communications, navigation, culture and cuisine. This section ends with a word of caution: “Many sailors are daunted by the West Coast of Ireland. They make swift passages to get to the more sheltered waters of Scotland where the marinas are strung out like pearls on a necklace. But to fully experience this unspoiled undeveloped coastal region, you need it to be more than a passage. Let it become a journey.”

What follows is a very well laid out guide to a cruise, starting from Malin Head at the north end and working south, ending in Cork, and home of the world’s oldest yacht club, The Royal Cork, established in 1720. There is a discussion about whether a north-to-south or south-to-north cruise makes more sense, but having done it both ways in their Bowman 57’ ketch, the authors conclude that it really doesn’t matter.



Each section starts with an aerial photo for orientation showing key place names and suitable harbors. They follow with a discussion of navigation and general impressions based on several visits over a number of years. They cover points of interest not only from a yachtsman’s perspective but also for a hiker, cyclist and even if one goes along the shore by car, though the latter is obviously somewhat tacit. What is more helpful, they are very generous with providing website links and other resources which could be very helpful for trip planning before setting out. A recurring theme is the need for self-sufficiency, as finding serious shore side assistance (other than rescue by the RNLI) in the region beyond Cork simply cannot be counted upon.

If read as a whole, the cruising section struck me as a wonderful collection of short stories. There is enough detail to be helpful and interesting but enough is left out for the cruiser to make additional discoveries themselves. The uniqueness and mystique of Ireland’s offshore islands is fascinating: Caher, Inishturk, Inishbofin and the Skelligs. Each is special and all deserve a visit, assuming the fickle weather allows. My visit to the ancient ruins of Dun Aengus on Inishmore was a highlight, as was a very generous tour of a RNLI – Royal Navy Lifeboat Institution – lifeboat.

The guide concludes with a list of West Coast sailing clubs, sail training centers, boat charter companies, flags and a lexicon of Irish place names.

I enjoyed reading about how the Irish west coast connects with recent history: The first transatlantic cable and telegraph station on Valentia Island in 1866; Marconi’s early wireless testing between Crookhaven and Fastnet Rock around 1901; The first nonstop transatlantic flight by Alcock and Brown, landing in Clifden in 1919; The sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915, with victims and survivors being brought to nearby Kinsale. (The site of the wreck is indicated on local charts.)

As an aside, before my Irish cruise in 2010, I read a number of books to help me better understand Irish history and culture. Two that left the deepest impression were “Trinity,” by Leon Uris and “On Celtic Tides” by Chris Duff, an American who kayaked the entire island in one season, the first person to do so.

In summary, *Cruising the Wild Atlantic Way* would be an ideal companion to those considering a visit to Ireland’s pristine west coast. It also whets my appetite to return and complete my cruise of this untamed and beautiful cruising area.

Available from White Seahorse Publishing,
www.whiteseahorse.ie

EDITORS’ NOTE: Doug Cole is an experienced CCA cruiser and former airline pilot who wrote a brief summary of his Ireland cruise in the 2011 issue of *Voyages*.

