

Baltic Section Rally 2007

Report by Laura Gill and Stuart & Marjorie Bradley
(The Crew of 'Concord')

After a summer of strong winds and rain that might have discouraged a less intrepid fleet, 26 boats assembled in Rudkøbing on the island of Langeland in Denmark for this year's Baltic Rally. The event started on the 17th August. Well, that's what we thought was going to happen. 'Concord' arrived at the harbour a week before to find that one boat was already there. Over the following days there seemed to be a party each time another boat arrived. It was remarkable how everyone joined in to help run such events, from day one until several days after the rally had officially ended.

During the summer the harbourmaster resigned to become the manager of a Ukrainian furniture factory. In his absence, the CA organisers allocated berths to the rally boats and collected the harbour dues at discounted rates. Fortunately, we were able to use the inner harbour beyond a lifting bridge. Roger and Stella Berkeley, whose boat 'Ciel of Plym' was moored by the bridge, were trained as bridge keepers. They performed this task with the utmost dedication, and have a certificate to prove it!

Derek and Elaine Grant in 'Wispa' were at their first Baltic Rally and said they didn't know many people, so they hosted a party two days before the official start. By the next day they realised they knew quite a lot of people. This idea seemed to catch on pretty quickly but participants were arriving thick and fast so the following night another party, jointly organised by 'Hexotic', 'Ciel of Plym', 'Bugsy Malone' and 'Ann', had to be held in larger accommodation at the yacht club.

Friday 17th August started warm and dry. A reporter from the island's newspaper came round to interview the rally organisers and to take pictures. The full-page spread the following day had the headline "British Sailors Invade Langeland" and contrasted this with the activities of the Vikings of old. Actually, one or two of our members did look rather like old Vikings but we heard no reports of pillaging etc. They must have been too tired from all the partying that was going on.

Volunteers rallied round in the afternoon to prepare the food. It was probably just a coincidence, but they were all ladies. Roger and Gwyn Robson cleaned up the barbecues, and Mike and Jacky Scott and their team organised the furniture in the clubhouse and around the barbecue area. It was fairly windy, not ideal weather for a barbecue, but Karsten Rode a local friend with an impressive list of influential contacts, soon had the charcoal glowing with the aid of somebody's industrial gas flamethrower. After a short welcome and briefing, Bent Jensen, a retired schoolteacher who represented the Rudkøbing Sailing Club, raised the Baltic Section flag and the cooks got cracking. By another coincidence they were all men. Many hands certainly made light work and it was amazing how quickly a meal for seventy people was prepared.

The menu included marinated pork steaks, turkey kebabs, and sausages made especially for the occasion by a local butcher. Together with the salads and Langeland new potatoes it all seemed to go down rather well, and we finished off with a special dessert of bananas roasted on the grill with honey and ice cream. Just as everyone had finished eating the heavens opened, so we retired to the clubhouse to watch the rain extinguishing the hot coals and to continue the party. It's timing like that which helps to make CA events so special.

Saturday brought sunshine. We gathered in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall. The Mayor, who had recently won a three-cornered election with 80% of the vote,

welcomed us and gave us a potted history of the working of Langeland Commune. On our behalf, Stuart Bradley thanked the Mayor for his warm welcome and presented the "Borgmester" with jams and biscuits from the larders of the Queen and the Prince of Wales. It had to be true because they all carried the appropriate royal coats of arms on the labels. If ever you're passing that way and feel like popping in, the Mayor's favourite marmalade is Frank Cooper's 'Oxford' Fine Cut. The final token of appreciation was a packet of Dr Stuart's herbal tea, which is recommended if you've overdone it the night before. We were then treated to Muscat wine and delicious almond cakes.

Two hours later we boarded a coach to Langeland Fort, a post WW2 military stronghold at the south of the island, which played an important role in the Cold War. The Russian ships carrying missiles to Cuba were first spotted from here. We explored bunkers, gun emplacements, jet fighters, a minesweeper and the most recently decommissioned Danish submarine. We were also able to wander around the open parkland and enjoy splendid views over the Great Belt.

One of the most moving parts of the museum was an exhibition highlighting the experiences of East Germans who escaped from the DDR by sea to Denmark, or who were picked up by Danish patrol vessels. People took enormous risks and endured considerable hardship during their escapes. Some homemade watercraft were on display. They didn't look safe enough to take across a park lake. Much of this information was in German and we were very grateful to Horst Safarovic for translating it for us and adding some of his own recollections from that time.

Dinner that evening was a carvery buffet in the waterside Skudehavn Hotel. All you could eat for £10 – amazing value, especially considering Danish prices. We were joined by our newly appointed HLR for the island of Fyn, Erik Haarløv with his wife Karen and daughter. After the meal we moved on to the clubhouse for more chat and Erik introduced himself. He expressed doubt that he would be allowed to continue being an HLR for long because he had taken advice from a CA member about filling in the forms to become one, and the advice had been to put a line through most of it!

On Sunday we visited Egeskov, a fairy tale castle in a lake, with delightful and spacious grounds. Many enjoyed the maze and the tree top walk, while the castle itself and the nine museums provided an interesting diversion and shelter from the occasional showers. A highlight of the tour was Titania's Palace, a doll's house made by the English painter Sir Neville Wilkinson for his daughter Gwendolyn because "she felt sorry for the fairies, who had to live in underground caves". It took him 15 years to build, decorate, and furnish it with miniature art treasures from all over the world. By this time she was probably well past believing in fairies! The handiwork is amazing, so intricate and delicate, and it's now worth a small fortune.

After dinner we regrouped in the clubhouse for an informal evening. There can't be many yacht clubs in the UK where they would simply give you the keys and say the place is yours. Having this facility available was a tremendous help in making a success of the less formal social activities. Ed Hoseason was our DJ for the evening, but the noise of conversation was almost deafening until our Chairman announced a limerick writing competition. Each verse had to include the word 'Denmark'. Peter Wilde, the assistant HLR for the Kiel Fjord was promoted to 'Professor' for the occasion and told one of his very amusing stories to illustrate the art of limerick writing. This task was entered into with gusto and, for a while, silence reigned as everyone put their heads down. The Cruising Association is a rich source of fertile minds! The limericks were hilarious so it wasn't quiet for long. Twice the Chairman was rendered speechless, and that takes some doing!

The final winner, after a re-run of the clapometer, was Sally Hackney, who generously shared her liquid winnings with the assembled company. Thomas Eaves, the runner up, was presented with a prize of the dregs in a whisky bottle from Concord's drinks cupboard. In his acceptance speech he likened it to coming second in a competition where the first prize was a week in Scunthorpe, and the second prize was two weeks. (Our apologies to the very fine people of Scunthorpe, allegedly a wonderful city.)

The final day was bright and sunny. Twenty-six hail and hearty cyclists, on a variety of mounts, set off for a ride across the island to Spodsbjerg. A large motor caravan called 'Dulcibella', acted as support vehicle and provided tea and coffee at the halfway stage. Actually, this proved to be the only drama of the rally. The driver missed a turning and arrived late at the rendezvous so he didn't have time to 'level' the vehicle, and one of the kettles fell off the cooker, bounced off a step and its hot contents flooded all over the carpet. Those who preferred beer didn't have to wait so long. A big thanks you to Horst for suggesting cold beverages to relieve the pressure in the galley. After a rest for lunch in Spodsbjerg the cyclists returned to base to recover for the evening's festivities. Meanwhile, another group enjoyed a guided tour of the interesting old town, which was enlivened by stories from times past.

The final evening's dinner was an excellent three-course meal, again in the hotel. The owner is a Yorkshire man. His wife sounds Yorkshire too, but she's Danish. She just learned her English from him! The CA President, Robin Guilleret, presented a CA burgee to the yacht club, and this was followed by the now traditional Baltic Section entertainment, which goes along the lines of "chiefly yourselves!" A rich variety of talent came to the fore. There were poems, songs, dances, musical interludes and jokes. It was a superb evening to round off the rally. It finished with everyone singing "We'll Meet Again", a popular Danish song, just before midnight. Nobody left early.

The following day the weather was awful and only a few boats left the harbour. No problem. Roger and Gwyn from 'Gentoo' saw it as an opportunity to host yet another party in the clubhouse. A lot of the crews clearly enjoyed being in Rudkøbing because there was no enthusiasm to leave. After a further day, and with the subtlety for which they are well known, the crew of 'Concord' could be heard singing, "We don't want to lose you but we think you ought to go".

The organisers owe a big debt of thanks to Karsten Rode, a good friend for the past five years, and a man who always seems to know a man who can. We could not be more grateful to the Rudkøbing Sailing Club and particularly its representative Bent Jensen. Bent lives only five minutes by bike from the harbour, and each time we rang him up he was there in five minutes. Also Anders Leth Christensen, the owner of Bianca Yachts, who provided support and presented each of the crews with canvas bags of goodies and kept the Union flags flying during our stay.

The rally participants were, of course, all handpicked and a finer bunch we could not have wished for. Most, if not all, helped in one way or another with berthing arrangements; bridge keeping; hosting parties; shopping; food preparation; furniture moving; barbecuing; clearing up; washing up; limerick writing; entertaining and other things too numerous to mention. The event, considered as a whole, was certainly proof that "the more you put into it, the more you get out of it". We look forward to seeing everyone again during the centenary year and hope it will prove to be "the same procedure as last year!"

(Some photos were kindly provided by Ivan Andrews)