The Passage from Fishguard to the Milford Haven Estuary

This passage will be rounding St David's Head, travelling through Ramsey Sound and Jack Sound, then on to St Ann's Head and into the Milford Haven River.

If you are considering this passage, the following advice should be noted:

- The whole trip will take about 7 to 8 hours and should be done in daylight.
- You must have detailed charts of the entire passage.
- The vessel should have a reliable engine as it will be necessary to maintain a speed of about 5 knots to complete the passage on one tide safely.

Bearing in mind we are using the tide in our favour, so travelling from Fishguard to say Dale, the tidal stream through both sounds will be heading south. If the wind is from the S or SW then expect over-falls and rough water in these areas. I would say if the wind is forecast as SW3 or more then don't go. If it's forecasted as N or NW then that's OK, you might even sail through the Sounds (but keep the engine running).

Leave Fishguard at Fishguard High Water. Buck the tidal stream up to Strumble. If you keep close in, you might even pick up a back-eddy which will assist your passage to Strumble. Round Strumble Head at slack water — actually the tidal stream mightstill be a bit against you but easing off.

Now comes the long slog up to St David's Head. This can take up to 3 hours or so, but the stream will start to work in your favour and your rate of progress will speed up. Do not wander inland of the line from Strumble Head to St David's Head as there are rocks under the surface. Stay on the seaward side of the line. Try to maintain a speed of 4 to 5 knots over the ground. When rounding St David's Head the tidal stream will now be strong and you may well be doing 7 or 8 knots.

Stay on the mainland side of the Sound. Travel across Whitesands Bay and give the reef of rocks on your left a reasonable offing. Stay on the left of the Sound. When you see the Lifeboat Station, head a little into the bay towards it. Keep to the left to avoid Horse Rock which is in the middle of the Sound. You won't see this rock but it is a danger and can show at LW springs.

Follow the mainland round. Keep to the mainland side of the Sound. When you emerge from the Sound, try to get towards the centre of the exit of the Sound to avoid Shoe Rock on your left. Several boats have hit this as they have turned too early to head to Solva.

It's worth mentioning here that the tidal stream will now be very strong and if you want to, for example, go a bit to the right, then steer a lot to the right, as the stream will sweep you on. Use the engine if necessary and always have it running.

Once you are free of the over-falls of Ramsey Sound the trip across St Brides Bay is easy — a time to put the kettle on. Try to maintain a speed of 5 knots.

Jack Sound is best taken on a course of 190°T, so it is important to start off from the correct position. As you approach the Sound you are quite likely to be set to the right of the entrance by the strong stream sweeping out of St Brides Bay. Most of the rocks to avoid can be seen but there is one lurking near the middie (usually submerged) called 'The Cable'. Go to the right of this rock (west of

it}. Pass through the channel on the Crab Stones' side but not too close as there's an underwater reef extending from the Crab Stones into the channel.

The tidal stream is strong here and any course alterations should take this into account. Remember the channel through is roughly on a North/South line. As you pass 'Cable Rock' - you might catch sight of it - you will almost certainly see disturbed water around it.

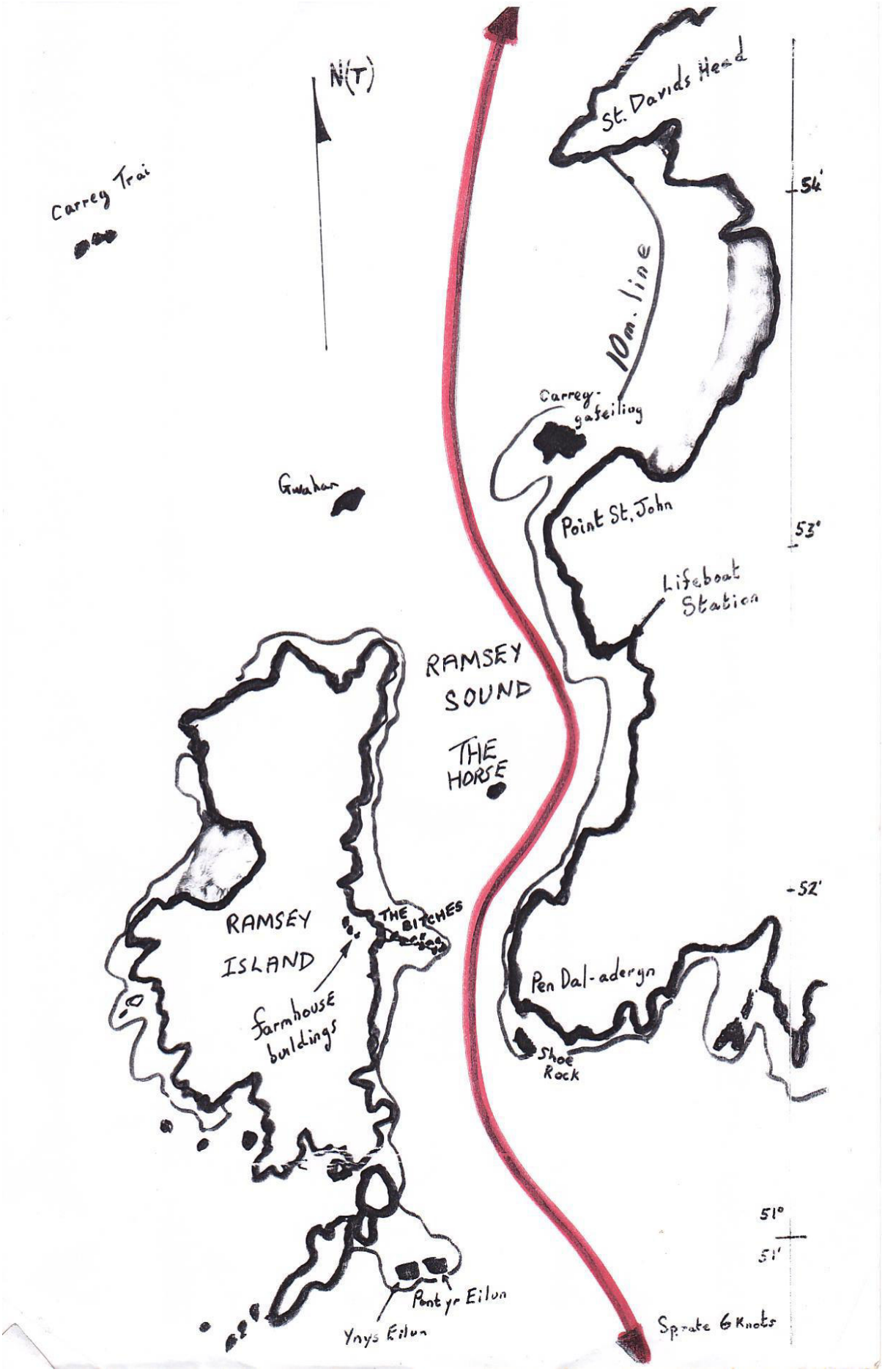
When you emerge from the Sound strong overfalls may be seen ahead especially if the wind has any south in it. Head the boat towards Skokholm Island where calmer water is to be found. This also takes you well away from 'The Bench' and Gateholm island.

Make for St Ann's Head and watch out for pot buoys. The stream in the river is now in flood so just right for progress up the river. Maintain a watch for ships entering or leaving the Haven.

Remember- these Sounds are treacherous — you must learn where these rocks are situated from your charts before attempting this passage.

Bryon Alabaster

(former RYA instructor)


N(T)
Carrey Trai
St. Davids Head
10m. line
Carrey-gateiliog
Gwahan
Point St. John
Lifeboat Station
RAMSEY SOUND
THE HORSE
RAMSEY ISLAND
THE BITCHES
farmhouse buildings
Pen Dal-adergn
Shoe Rock
Pont yr Eilun
Ynys Eilun
Sprate 6 Knots
54'
53'
52'
51°
51'