

K40 maiden voyage report.

The western part of the Golfe du Morbihan was the venue of the maiden voyage of my brand new K40 IK. The conditions were good : calm to light wind, neap tides. My float plan was to push off from Fort Espagnol in the Rivière d'Auray and paddle downstream until I could turn east upstream towards Larmor-Baden, then try to pass to the east side of Berder island. From there I would let go downstream with the end of the ebb tide until it reverses, then ride the flow back to my departure point.

Tides are critical here because they generate strong currents. So any trip in the golfe should be planned and scheduled according to the tides. A key feature of the tide in the GdM is that there is roughly 2 hour delay between the water height at the entrance and the main stream. This means that while the water start rising after low water at Port Navalo, the current goes on ebbing for another 2 hours or so before reversing. Similarly, the current starts ebbing 2 hours or so after high water at Port Navalo. The current is synchronous with the water level in Penboch, a headland located 6 Nm inside the GdM, on the north shore, and in the rivière d'Auray as well.

I pushed off from Fort Espagnol at 8 and paddled southward with the help of the rest of the ebb as planned. I passed along the east side of the Grand Harnic islet then between Sept-Iles and Renaud island.



There was just enough water left for a kayak. This area is scattered with arrays of oyster bags barely signaled by rotten poles. These bags rest on iron frames which are a real danger to navigation, besides getting lost in this maze of islands and narrows, and being rammed by a tourist boat.

Out of the shoals I hit the ebb stream running fast in the deeper channel. I stayed close to the limit of the shoals, taking advantage of eddies or at least slower moving waters, and reached the moorings of Larmor-Baden. There I caught a convenient eddy which drew Southward along Berder

island. Stopping at the south tip I watched the powerful main stream running between Berder and Ar Gazek islands.



Ar Gazek (the mare) gives its name to the stream which is called here "courant de la Jument" (stream of the mare) and runs at 9 knots in spring tide. Close to the shore there is a kind of liquid step formed by the current rushing over the shallow water. I decided to try to break through. Holding fast to the thigh braces, I flung myself into the stream and successfully overcome the current with a quick but not the quickest paddling pace and reached an eddy inside a small bay on the east side of Berder.

Next move was to paddle to Ar Gazek across a wider body of current where two streams were merging, one tumbling from the NE, the other from SE, before being squeezed between Berder and Ar Gazek. Again I raced against the tide and ferry glided to the north tip of Ar Gazek, landing slightly short of point I had aimed at. I stopped in a pool of slack water then paddled on southward along the shore until I found the stream running SW between Danlen and Ar Gazek. I rounded the southern tip of the island and set a course towards the conspicuous standing stones crowning the small Er Lannic (the small meadow) islet. I landed near the fallen stones of the lower circle. While the current was still ebbing, the water level had started rising, but not enough to let me paddle between the standing stones. I carried on and ferry glided to Gavrinis (the goat's island), famous for its impressive tumulus, stopped for a couple of minutes by the jetty, then went on right in the middle of the stream, riding some interesting chop trying to hold a straight course despite the whirlpools. Again the rudder and the thigh braces helped a lot to keep control of the boat in seething waters. I stopped in the eddy past the Grand Mouton beacon, which marks approximately the point beyond which the stream turns southward. I set a course to Meaban, a small island lying a couple of miles away to the south.

When I entered back into the Golfe returning from Meaban, the flow had started and pulled me in. I turned left at the Goemorent red tower, leaving the main stream to enter the Rivière d'Auray.



About 5 hours and 30 km after push-off, I eventually landed near the Fort Espagnol jetty, where the crew of a beautiful and elegant skiff (a "baleinière") was having a pique-nique. From the many empty wine bottles scattered on the tiny beach I concluded that rowing is a sport that makes one thirsty.