

Sailing to ISISA XVI

The easiest and fastest way for ISISA participants to get from Schiphol Airport to Leeuwarden was by train. Within a few hours across the Dutch polder landscape, you could reach the capital of the Province of Friesland, where the 16th ISISA Islands of the World Conference would start on June 10. However, an alternative way of travelling to Friesland was also offered by the organizing committee: sailing with an old clipper from Amsterdam to Harlingen, just like in the old days.



A group of eight ISISA conference participants boarded the *Willem Jacob*, a renovated cargo ship built at the end of the 19th century. A crew of three warmly welcomed us on board: Tsjerk, owner and skipper; Gerard, his assistant; and Ingrid, the cook. Jointly, they would provide us with a mobile home for a few days and excellent food along the way. Starting from a quay behind the Central Station in Amsterdam the clipper set sail to Harlingen on Friday evening, 8 June. Through impressive sluices we entered the Markermeer, a lake that is named after the island Marken and that was planned to

become a polder until the 1960's. But that plan was never materialized.

The life history of the *Willem Jacob* is an interesting one. The ship was built as a sailing ship in 1889 near Rotterdam. It was initially used for transporting bricks. Most of the time, the ship sailed on the Rhine and particular to Germany. In a later stage, a small engine was installed in case winds were not strong enough or coming from the wrong direction, or when the ship had to pass through narrow canals. Later all kinds of cargo were transported. At a later stage a strong engine replaced all the sails as the source of power. In 2004 the ship was restored again as a sailing ship and prepared for accommodating passengers. Nowadays the ship mainly sails across the IJsselmeer and the Wadden Sea, as one of the estimated 400 ships of the so-called 'brown fleet' that makes up the floating heritage of a shipping tradition in the Netherlands. Groups of Dutch and foreign tourists make up their clientele.



Though the ship has been renovated and equipped with some modern facilities, sailing the ship is still hard work. Lifting the sails, tacking, pulling the ropes and steering is intensive and requires coordinated action in which the passengers are supposed to participate. Fortunately Grant (McCall) volunteered to skillfully supervise the hard working crew members, including Pier (Vellinga) who turned out to be an experienced sailor. Beate (Ratter), Rose (Azzopardi), Silke (Hensel), Steve and James (Ellsmoor) turned out to be eager ship mates, willing to tuck up their sleeves, learn complex knots, pull ropes whenever necessary or lower and fold the sails when it was time to rest. Sailing such a ship also provides a glimpse of the harsh and difficult life that the skippers and their families must have led in former times.

On Saturday we sailed across IJsselmeer which was originally an inner-sea. However in 1932 when the Afsluitdijk connected the northeastern part of North Holland with northwestern part of Friesland the inner-sea became a fresh water lake named after the main river (the IJssel) that debouches into the lake. Due to their flat bottom these old ships can easily sail across the relatively shallow IJsselmeer and avoid the sandbanks and mud flats.

While sailing we were passing by old towns, like Enkhuizen, former small fishing villages and the islands of the former Zuiderzee. We were heading towards Kornwerderzand, to the Lorentz Sluices in the Afsluitdijk. Just before passing through the sluices we visited the



newly opened Afsluitdijk/Wadden Centre. This centre was built exactly 100 years after adoption of the law that would turn the Zuiderzee into the IJsselmeer. A damaging storm with hundreds of casualties along the borders of the Zuiderzee made the Dutch parliament decide that the innersea should be cut off from the sea, thereby shortening the coastline with some 200 kilometers. The plan for which civil engineer and minister Cornelis Lely had been lobbying for a long time was finally accepted. The Afsluitdijk was finished in 1932 after which the drainage of larger polders could start.

By moving through the Lorentz Sluices on Saturday evening, we moved from the fresh water of the IJsselmeer into the salt water of the Waddensea. Soon after we passed the sluices, the captain looked out for a sandbank on which the ship could 'fall dry' ('droogvallen') at low tide. This implies that the ship is landed on the sandbank and that it would stay there until the next high tide would lift the ship again. Just after midnight Steve and James stepped down from the ship and walked on the sandbank, a new experience.



The next morning after a great breakfast we set sail to Harlingen. But with the wind coming from the wrong direction and a relatively small channel in between extensive sandbanks, we had to zigzag continuously, tacking time and time again while progressing in the right direction very slowly. This slow pace allowed us to see some seals and numerous birds, including spoonbills, and godwits labelled as the *King of the Meadows* in Friesland. The final part of the trip was done using the engine in order to bring us to the harbour of Harlingen. After a short trip by taxi, we arrived in time in Leeuwarden to merge with the participants that had come by train or car. However, we agreed that the ideal way to go to an island conference is by means of a 'slow boat', putting you in the right mindset.

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