

From Plymouth Sound to the Hamble – Mark Jenkins

The ISW 2019 Regatta between June 22nd and 29th had around 50 Shrimpers arriving for a fun week of sailing, social and land-based activities. Winds were mixed with exceptionally high ones (40kns plus) on Thursday and Friday.

Some boats had sailed to Plymouth from the east coast, some from Poole and some from Falmouth, and most trailed. *bluejay* (1152) and *Camaron* (940) launched in Plymouth from trailers on Tuesday the 18th, prepared to sail, and did just that the following day. We sailed to Cawsand, round the breakwater, circumnavigated Drakes Island and raced up to Saltash and back – what a wonderful six hours in good winds. The next day we sailed as far up the River Yealm as water would allow and back, only to return there again the next day in more of a ‘cruising mode’ with extra crew and combined this with a walk around Newton Ferrers.

On the Saturday ISW began and was greatly enjoyed by many happy Shrimperers in many different guises. The day before the rally ended, a few skippers decided to sail east afterwards, despite a forecast of very light winds. A skippers’ meeting was held ashore at 08.30 to discuss the outline plan, take ideas and options and agree communications (to be VHF Ch 77).

Four boats were going to Salcombe: three 19s - Bob Whitehouse’s *Boudicca* (423), Phil Coleman’s *Spud* (1109) and Mike Woods’s *Black Magic* (471), and one 21 (Tony Burns’s *Calypso* (52).

Four additional boats were to go with them and decide their options a mile off Salcombe, but who favoured pushing further east. Again three 19s - Mark Jenkins’s *bluejay*, Karen Macey’s *Camaron* and Christopher Froelich’s *Shrimpy* (1101), and one 21 – Mike Nichols’s and Kevion Dillon-White’s *Blackjack* (12).

Day One Sat 29th June HW Dover 09.08 LW Plym 09.41

We left the marina at 10.00 and passed the breakwater half an hour later to be greeted by the ‘Electric Shrimper’ taking photographs of our departure. *Black Magic* was a little delayed but the ‘Magnificent Seven’ set off under main and motor in moderate visibility of around five miles. After the huge easterly winds of Thursday and Friday it was surprising to find the sea so flat. As we looked astern we could just about see Rame Head and said ‘*totsients*’ to Cornwall and the aircraft carrier *Queen Elizabeth*, which had been anchored off the breakwater for several days.

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Leaving Plymouth and the Queen Elizabeth

The Mewstone was safely passed to port. Variable, largely westerly airs of 3-7 knots were a little disappointing as was the (very surprising) delay in the turn of the channel tide.

Judging by the many lobster pots, I reckoned the channel tide turned east some three hrs after LW Plymouth, which could easily fool us Poole/Solent sailors.

Four boats turned in at Salcombe, and the next difficulty was finding guaranteed berths for the remaining four in Dartmouth and Brixham, caused in part by the Classic Yachts weekend regatta in Dartmouth and the lack of boat movement from Brixham due to very strong winds for the two days before. After a series of VHF, mobile phone and face-to-face ‘negotiations’ with the Dartmouth Harbour Office, the boats were neatly secured at the dinghy pontoon in Dartmouth.

The sun came out, as did the drinks and snacks on *bluejay* for all five sailors to debate the venue of their evening meal, departure time the next day and likely destinations. What a range of ideas! Exmouth or Lyme Regis for novelty, Portland or Weymouth for a realistic stopover and the outside chance of Poole, which seemed too far in one day with a fresh westerly forecast. Dinner at the Floating Bridge was excellent and a sober 04.00 departure on Sunday was agreed.

Day Two Sun 30th June HWD 09.54 PH Plym (used for tidal streams of Portland Bill) **HW Portland 18.00**

Darkness and navigation lights on at 04.00, then the clearly lit channel greeted the four Shrimpers as we headed out past the mew stone to be confronted by an unexpected sight. It looked as though a new, giant headland or rock had been discovered just to the east! As dawn emerged, an enormous container ship was revealed, which later forced us into a clear change of course as she gathered speed rapidly, heading west.

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Sails up, but we needed more speed so a little bit of motor until around 06.00. *Blackjack* headed further south than the three 19s all sailing close enough to chat about the day ahead and the excitement of being at the far end of Lyme Bay in time to take the inshore passage round into Portland or Weymouth. At this point *Shrimpy* decided to head for Poole, expecting a 22-23.00hrs arrival at the Royal Motor YC, i.e. after the last launch service.



We had fantastic sailing as the westerly gave us a few hours of perfect running, whisker poles out then back in as winds freshened. Soon the seas rose as wind and tide helped us across the rather boring Lyme Bay. A brief dolphin display distracted skippers as cameras took priority over tillers.

The three 19s were sailing at identical speeds with a bit of fun being had when I threw three Werthers Originals towards the cockpit of *Camaron*. One landed perfectly in the skippers hands (did I ever play quoits?), the second hit my boom and disappeared and the third was caught by the smiling skipper. As the Meatloaf song goes, 'Two out of three ain't bad', especially running downwind!

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AT LAST! The lighthouse at Portland Bill was spotted just off the port bow but alas we were inevitably fighting the tide so it was a sight we had for too many hours. Perhaps the thought of achieving the small (14.00-16.00) window of rounding the Bill via the inshore passage distracted us from looking astern, because we all failed to notice the increasing white crests as the wind now appeared to be now more force 5 than 4. We should have put reefs in but didn't, which we came to regret later as the swell rose to over 8ft and the prospect of turning to reef became very uninviting.

Several hours riding the waves with non-stop tiller movement was taking its toll on the left shoulder and arms as auto helm and brakes were inadequate in these seas. Also, there was no chance of going below for water, chart-checking etc as every wave produced a violent surge of the stern as the tide turned against wind, though soon to be in our favour.

Christopher started to pull ahead as he surfed the waves better than me, and I put three rolls into my jib. Perhaps we should have altered course to allow a goose-wing to steady the boat or just to have tacked down wind – who knows? Mental calculations were transmitted using the Vodafone network and suggested we had missed the window to go inshore so staying 5.5 miles offshore was deemed prudent.

Other vessels were spotted close-by which gave us confidence that our distance off the Race was about right. Then *Blackjack* came screaming in from the south across us on a port reach with two reefs and we then had the big decision to make: join them in West Dorset for the night or carry on to Poole. Much debating and measuring of distances and tidal effects, as both options had their advantages. Tiredness at this point seemed the greatest risk but the sailing was exhilarating and possibly drove adrenalin to overcome the aches.

Cameron made the decision, which proved to be another good one, and joined *Shrimpy* in a race for the Swash Channel at Poole. This was based on a soon-to-be east-going tide, a slightly smaller sea and an increasing wind from astern. The calculation was that Anvil Point would be no later than reaching Weymouth, which would again need an early start in fresh winds. As *Shrimpy* pulled further ahead, *Cameron* took the best decision to gybe at Durlleston and, after 13 hours-plus on starboard, had a different shoulder to strain in flatter seas but higher gusts. Off Swanage I had three rolls in the jib and a totally ineffective main.

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Once round Old Harry (how good was it to see our old friend!) the sail into Poole was so fast the ferry had to concentrate! We were into the harbour before 19.30 – an incredible 3.5 hrs from Portland Bill – Big Boats rarely do that. *Camaron* and *Shrimpy* picked up their own moorings off the Royal Motor YC, being taken ashore by the club launch. At Parkstone, *bluejay* dropped into a visitor's berth with the skipper tired and thirsty. The club's bar income took an immediate turn for better as sleep on board had never been more welcome.

Day Three – Monday 1st July

This was a rest day, visiting other Shrimper at Poole YC who had trailed back.

Day Four – Tuesday 2nd July

My weather forecast gave me one day of northerly before it turned east, so I set another 03.30 alarm and left a few minutes later with nav lights on and keeping to 4 knots over the ground. A cold wind from Bournemouth made a jacket necessary but spirits were lifted by three daft mackerel who decide to take a bite on my spinners (these were put on the bbq just a few hours later along with home-grown lettuce, mayo and chopped spring onions).

The wind picked up a little off Hurst and *bluejay* was ushered through at a great rate with a strong flood tide as the Solent sun emerged behind Lymington. Just off Newtown, I had to put in my first tack of this entire passage from Cornwall, reaching Badnam Creek on the Hamble River at 11.00. A total of 155 nautical miles, mostly in company and generally an enjoyable experience, Cornwall to Hampshire with one day's rest, was epic but maybe not to be repeated every month!!

Should anyone wish to discuss 'lessons learned' I would be delighted to arrange a lunch or evening because, as with all sailing, there is just so much to talk about, especially in the areas of preparation and planning, sailing skills and knowing your own boat.

I have come to love *bluejay* and will always remember those two weeks we had together, meeting many acquaintances along the way – of the human and nautical varieties.

Mark Jenkins – *bluejay* (1152)