

Solent Cruise Week - June 1999

This was our 8th annual cruise week and the meeting point this year was Island Harbour, River Medina, with 12 Shrimpers arriving on the afternoon of Saturday 26th June. *Periwinkle*, *Demelza*, *Shellback* and *Lucy* made a very swift 3 hour run from Chichester, to find *Clementine*, *Lost Society* and *Outrigger* already sampling the red wine. Meanwhile *Barnacle*, *Jessie*, *Winkle Too*, *Nelly Bee* and *Saucy Ann II* had a wet and tiring beat down Southampton Water and across Bramble Bank.

By teatime all were safely in the marina and the reunion was in full swing. It was good to see Gus Davidson again, who was crewing on *Shellback* for a few days. Gus is building a Golant Gaffer, which he hopes to launch in the Spring, in time for Brest 2000. Having spent several hours that day in a Shrimper cockpit, Gus put us all to shame by running 12 miles before supper. Don't you just hate blokes who can do that without having to book into intensive care afterwards.

On Sunday we locked out of Island Harbour, sailed through the mayhem of Cowes on the morning after the Round the Island race, and sailed on to Yarmouth against a F4/5 S.W. wind. The western Solent produced its usual wind over tide chop, which was fun but very wet. The crew of *Shellback* were spotted sitting out, and there was even talk of a trapeze. On arrival at Yarmouth we rafted up comfortably on the Sandhard Pontoon, and went ashore to the Kings Head for supper.

During the night the wind and rain arrived in earnest, and a grey, wet and windy Monday morning greeted our gaggle of maritime campers. Full oilskins and boots were the order of the day; and that was just to reach the ablutions. Later in the day the rain at last eased, and an excursion up the River Yar by dinghy was considered. In the event however we decided to walk. Led by Cliff Champion, putting his re-modelled leg to the test, we followed the old railway track beside the river to Freshwater, where the Royal Oak pub was the find of the week.

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In fact it proved so popular that we returned by bus the following evening for supper.

We had hoped to have been in Christchurch on Monday, to meet up with *Adagio*, *Paper Moon* and *Georgie Girl*, but the weather put paid to our plans. Instead we remained weather bound in Yarmouth until Wednesday morning. We did however make much use of the Royal Solent Y.C. bar with its excellent view of the Solent.

At last, on Wednesday morning, we bade farewell to Yarmouth, where we were now on first name terms with the harbour office staff, and were negotiating Air Miles with the water taxi. We have learnt through bitter experience that our cruise week plans have to be flexible, and so it was that we gave Newtown Creek a miss, ran before the wind to Cowes, and sailed up the Medina River to Newport. *Outrigger* proudly demonstrated her colourful genniker on the downwind leg, but as the dinghy was in tow, no advantage was apparent. After a splendid tacking race up to the Island capital, the fleet moored up at the quay pontoons.

No sooner had kettles been put on stoves, than we were shocked to hear the crew of *Saucy Ann II* announce that they were sinking. Tim Hepple immediately turned to, dived into the aft locker, and quickly diagnosed a defective stern gland. Enter a most helpful Harbourmaster, who was able to introduce our forlorn friends to a boatyard close by, where, within half an hour the Shrimper had been hauled out, and repairs commenced. Panic over, the fleet crews started the evening 'Wimbledon style' with strawberries & cream and cocktails on the pontoon, before heading off to the nearest Curry House.

At 1100 next morning *Saucy Ann II* was back in the water, ready to go, so off we set for Beaulieu. A brisk S.W. wind blowing straight up the western Solent made for an exciting beat across in close company. The boats were a real picture, and had we not all been hanging on for grim

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death, anyone with an underwater camera could have taken some very nice photos. Once into the Beaulieu entrance, testosterone overcame caution, and the front runners engaged in a tacking duel up the river. However, to preserve domestic harmony aboard, one by one the sails were dropped. Only then did *Shellback* discover that the bow rope was now round the outboard prop, and *Jessie* learnt a hard lesson about leaving scuttles open when putting to sea.

Our berth that night was at Gins Farm (Royal Southampton Y.C.) where we enjoyed the odd 'G & T' on the clubhouse balcony, with its magical view, followed by an excellent dinner. On the Friday morning the sun at last showed itself. Our fleet goose-winged down the river in light airs and out into the Solent, bound for Wootton Creek. The wind died for a while off Cowes, and it looked as though the ebb was about to flush us down the west Solent. Just in time, the wind filled from the S.E. and we tacked across Osborne Bay in true competitive fashion.

Friday evening found us alongside the rather smart new pontoons of the Royal Victoria Y.C. at Wootton Creek. We were joined for the end of cruise supper at the club by Rodney Arnold, Robin Harper and Alison Taylor, who had arrived via the nearby Wightlink ferry. Between the *hors d'oeuvre* and the main course, entertainment was provided by *Winkle Too*, which arrived an hour before low water, and defied all the watching pundits by making it to the pontoon.

The drill for Saturday was departure for home ports. Chichester bound boats set off reefed and running hard and made good passage time. Solent boats had to contend with a brisk S.W. wind, and once past Cowes it became hard work. *Jessie* was bound for Poole single handed, but by Lyminster the thought of beer, fish & chips, and an early night seemed more inviting than Christchurch Bay with the wind on the nose. A good decision, because on Sunday morning, summer arrived. With a 5.30am departure, *Jessie* was on her buoy at the Royal Motor Y.C. by 9.00am, with the skipper enjoying a 'full English' in the club.