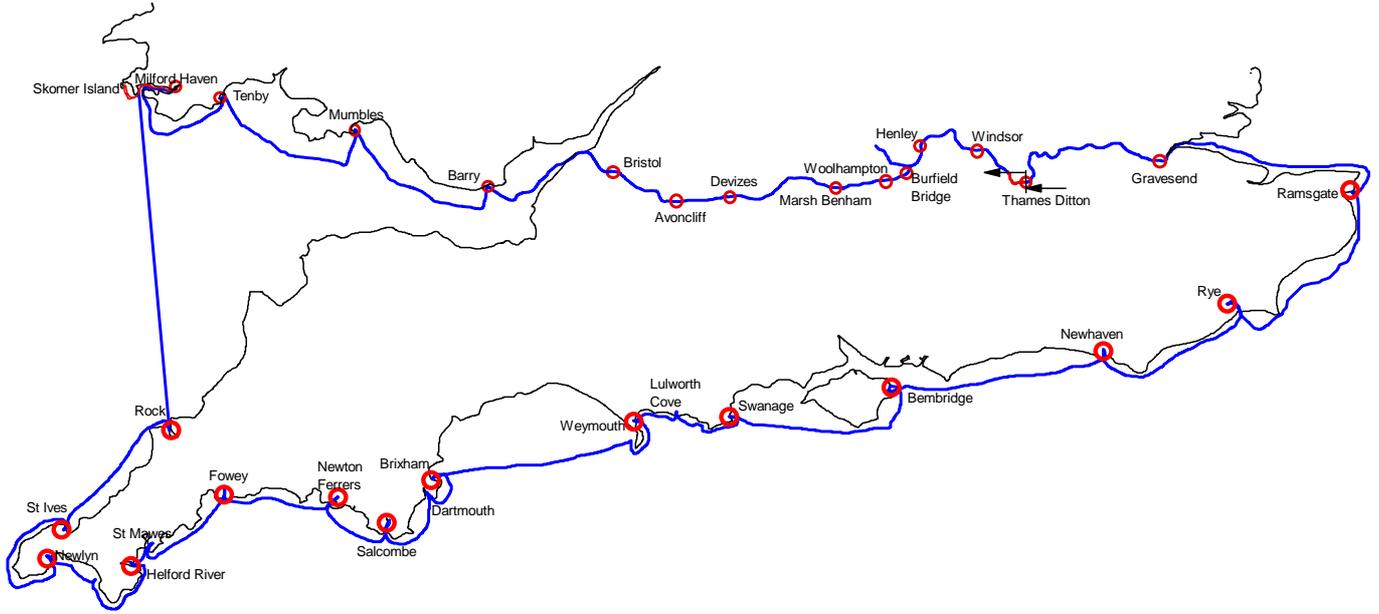
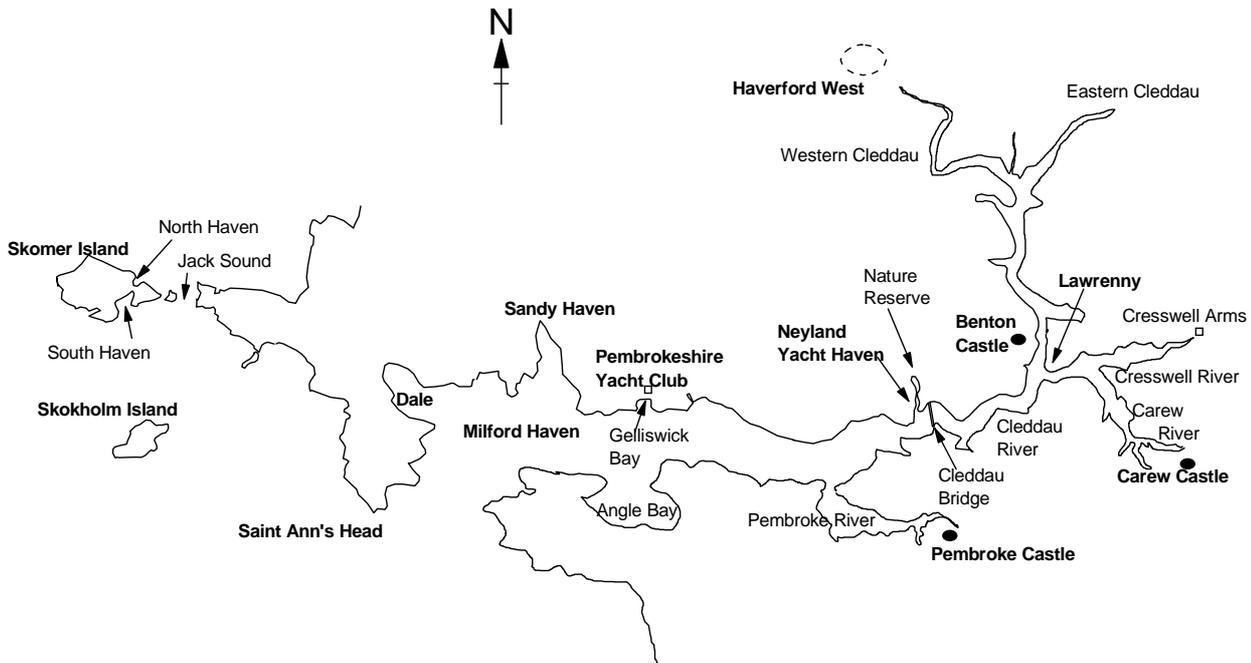


South Circular voyage of Bumble Chugger (124) - 2004 by Robin and Gillie Whittle

The south circular voyage in Bumble Chugger was planned to start and finish at Thames Ditton on the Thames. The first part of the plan was to motor, with the rig down, up the Thames to Reading and then take the Kennet and Avon canal down to Bristol. The second part was to sail from Bristol down the Avon Gorge to the Bristol Channel and then along the south coast of Wales to Milford Haven, where we would meet twenty other Shrimpers for the National Week. This would be the third part. The fourth and final part was to sail from Milford Haven down to Padstow and then on round Land's End, along the south coast to Dover and then up the Thames back to Thames Ditton.



Part 3: Milford Haven



We reached Neyland Yacht Centre at 3.30pm on Thursday, 1 July, and were the first Shrimper to arrive. A little later Herman Legger appeared and introduced us to his crew, Meno. They had had a long, arduous journey from Holland by land. They went off to launch their boat. We settled down for a game of Scrabble. This was soon interrupted by the patter of rain on the cabin roof, and we had a mad rush to

get the washing and papers into the dry. It rained hard in the night, but we were snug in the cabin in calm, smooth water! Wonderful!

By Friday morning the heavy rain had turned to intermittent showers, and there were glimpses of blue sky and sun in the brisk wind. Today the Shrimpers would start arriving and Roy Harper, who was organising the week, came down to welcome us. Whenever we saw him during the next two days he was always on the run - helping launching on the ramp, organising lifts in with the crane, getting the trailers suitably parked, and directing people to B & Bs if they were not staying on board.



We climbed the steps and steep path into Neyland High Street and found the shops we needed - very different from most high streets: looking up the road there was very little to show that there were shops there, it looked like a street of houses, but as you walked by some had been converted to shops but with no advertising outside. An exception was SPAR which was well advertised and well stocked. We tried to get Nev or some waterproofing stuff at the old fashioned have-everything ironmongers, but without success. Our sailing clothes (for coastal sailing) are totally inadequate for the type of sailing we've been doing. The water comes straight through from the breaking waves and we've been getting soaked. We need to get offshore gear - or else change our style of sailing!

On our way back we passed a row of Brunel's railway workers' cottages, set at the top of the steep hillside overlooking the marina and the Cleddau River, and basking in the sun. A lady was sitting outside with her cup of coffee, and we commented on her sun trap and wonderful view. She was very happy to chat, starting with a complaint about the road sweeper who had just done the top end of their road, and as usual had turned back without coming down to their cul-de-sac. We admired the colourful flowers outside each house, and she pointed out some poppies growing randomly in the paving outside one house. An old lady had lived there and she had a whole flower bed full of poppies. When she died last year, the new people in the house covered in the flower bed, and Beth was so pleased when she saw they'd self-seeded this year. Beth's friend from two doors up joined us and they pointed out the steep hillside which dropped away from the road on the far side from the houses. It was owned by the Council and was wild and overgrown. They had taken it under their wing, and every day they both spent an hour working on it. They were very proud of their efforts, and it was beginning to look lovely with fuchsia and buddleia and mallow. They had thrown bulbs down and they had rooted and flowered in the spring. A son came in and cleared the brambles now and then. Their main problem was the steep angle they were trying to work on, and we suggested they roped themselves to the railing at the top, which they thought was a good idea.

Back down the hill and a wander along the quay in the hope of finding petrol, without success. It was a busy hubbub with twenty seven 1720 Cork one designs arriving for a racing weekend. They were big racing machines with fixed keels and a crew of six. Many were having their shiny smooth bottoms and rudders polished - real serious stuff! Rob chatted to the skipper of one who was an ex 505 sailor. Towards the end of the quay near the open water we were hit by huge gusts of wind.

A peaceful afternoon on board with Brian Harrison, a new Shrimper owner, joining us for a cup of tea. We tidied up for the evening and went up to the car park, where Roy picked up Rob and a couple of petrol cans, and took him off to a nearby garage. Kay and Valerie were in the car park having just arrived. Gillie went over to say hello, and found they were having trouble getting their trailer unhooked from the car. Barry came over to help and soon Roy and Rob returned. With the real engineers on the job the problem was finally successfully sorted!

A group of us set off for Neyland Yacht Club, half a mile away - Roy, Ben and Gillie Fitzgerald, John Morgan and us. On our walk we passed through a little park dominated by a statue of Brunel. All our trip we had been made aware of the amazing dominance and control Brunel had achieved - the brick bridge at Maidenhead, still the world's longest brick span; at Bristol the 'Great Britain', the yards, the slipways, the locks; and now at Neyland his influence with the railway.

Roy had planned that we should have supper at the sailing club, but it was seething with the 1720 sailors. We passed Herman and Meno ensconced at a table but there seemed no other spaces. We battled our way through to the bar, where Ben and Gillie decided to go back to the marina for food, and on to their B & B. John Morgan left as well to pick up a Chinese meal to eat on the beach. Almost immediately it was welcoming speech time for the 1720s, so many people moved to the far end of the club, which just left us room to squeeze onto a table and order food. Rob chatted to a 1720 lady on our table who had known Ben Ainsley since he was a boy and had grown up with her children. Herman and Meno came over to join us, and later Mike Hopkins and his son, Brian.

We didn't stay late. The wind was well up and buffeting us on our walk back to "Bumble Chugger".

Saturday 3rd July. It was sunny and sheltered in the marina, but there had been no abatement in the wind, and it was Force 6 to 7 out in the Sound. The 1720 crews were up early and along our pontoon to get to their boats, some of the girls looking somewhat unhappy. We watched them setting off; they had some pretty exciting racing and 3 broke their masts. We chatted to various people passing by, and Ben and Gillie brought their boat round and moored along the pontoon next to us as more sheltered from the wind than their original position. Andrew and Tina arrived and rafted up to them. Soon it was celebrating arrival time, and we moved onto "Badger" with our gin bottle and cashew nuts.



First briefing from Roy

After lunch on "Bumble Chugger" we went for a walk following the marina inland and on into a nature reserve. It was really lovely in the sun and sheltered from the wind. There were winding paths through large areas of water populated with different types of duck, and swans, and waders and herons. On our way back we sat on the grass for a while by a stretch of water, and watched a heron busy catching things - unusual as they generally seem to stand around and do nothing! Some interested ducks came up and inspected us, and two swans with their three cygnets floated up and down. Pa swan was quite belligerent towards the heron, which was just minding its own business.



We separated at the boat, Rob to sort out things and write the log, while Gillie dashed up to the town to get a Daily Telegraph, it being Saturday. All four shops had sold out, so no crossword this week. Back to the pontoon to find Brian Meopham on board, and Rob chatting - not getting on. Brian was a mine of information with a lot of local knowledge.

At seven Ellie and Roy picked us up in the car park and they kindly gave us a lift to the Ferry House Inn for the welcoming meal. It should have been possible to sail there, with a pontoon outside, but the wind was still much too high. We sat with Barry and Carol, and Roy and Ellie and had a very pleasant dinner. Then speeches from Roy and Barry, and Roy was presented with the Barge Trophy.

Sunday 4th July. The wind had moderated and the sun was out, just as ordered for the first Shrimper expedition. So after Roy had given us a briefing on the pontoon, we stowed things away, got "Bum Chug" out, cleaned up and blown up. We had a problem when Rob tried to start the engine as the puller rope broke at the handle. We were already drifting out from the pontoon so there was a rush to get the sails up. It was a tricky manoeuvre getting out of the marina without engine power but we managed with a bit of help from a paddle. There was a bit of swearing from other boats, who didn't realise we were engineless!

We all set off down the Sound, and after 6 or 7 miles we tucked in behind one of the oil terminal jetties and into Gelliswick Bay. A number of Shrimpers were clustered round a small pontoon which we thought was connected to land on one arm of the sandy bay. We arrived with rather a whoosh with the main up, and were well fielded by Christopher Robinson in "Nocturne", and Herman came over to give us a hand. In fact the pontoon was out in the middle of the bay, so we all had to disembark into our tenders and row quite a long way to the Pembroke Yacht Club, situated at the end of a long flat beach. There we got drinks at the bar, and were provided with a very good sandwich lunch.



Race briefing at Pembroke Yacht Club

When it was time to leave we were greeted by a great area of golden sand, and not nearly so far to row. At 3.30 it was the start of an 'anchors down' race. A new concept for us, and for everyone else I think. We started facing away from the race direction and in turning round our bow was in danger of ramming "Clementine". Barry fended us off in the nick of time - a fact he is not going to let us forget. Bumping the flagship - we ought to be court martialled! We ding donged with Barry all the way up to the finishing line of the Cleddau Bridge, but he beat us to it. Robin Wearn on "La Mouette" had sensibly allowed himself plenty of clear water at the start, got away very quickly and maintained his lead to the end. Ben Fitzgerald was 2nd, Andrew Fitzgerald 3rd, Barry 4th and us 5th.

We continued up the Cleddau River under jib only with the rising tide. It became a beautiful empty river flowing through countryside with steeply wooded banks as we left the docks, refineries and commerce behind. We took the right hand fork at the pub and landing stage at Lawrenny, and when we came to a further fork most of the fleet followed the Carew River to anchor in an area of water in front of Carew Castle. Unfortunately “Lady Eleanor” grounded on a mud bank and had to wait for the rising water to refloat. We had intended to follow her up the Cresswell River, the left hand channel, so we were left to find our own way along a narrow river through mud flats and a mixture of woods and fields. The tide was still very low although the water was rising rapidly now. After a few bends we came upon June, Bryn and Alice Bird with “Gwendoline” who had run aground a few minutes earlier. We were able to creep past them, and they were soon following behind. We made our way in a series of stops and starts as it was difficult to tell the line of the deepest part of the river. After a mile of struggling we arrived at Cresswell Quay, the head of the navigable river, situated by the Cresswell Arms and a small collection of houses. It was still low water and very muddy but we managed to pull ourselves through and up to a vertical ladder fixed to the very high stone quay wall.

Clambering up on to the quay we found a very beautiful spot which seemed very isolated. However apparently there were regular events there: a barbecue had been held the night before and there was a book sale spread out on trestles, and an organic vegetable stall. The pub was tiny, with the original old flag stones and bar, and an aged Aga in the corner. They had kept the old custom of pouring the beer into the glasses from a jug.

Roy and Ellie arrived, having had an easier passage with more water, and joined us on the quay for a drink. It was a beautiful evening, though with a chilly wind, and we watched some canoeists by some stepping stones further up the river, and looking down we could see the bream coming up with the flood. Actually we couldn't see the fish in the mirk, but we could see their bow waves!



The tide was up, having risen over four feet within forty minutes, when it came time to leave. We had an easy trip down the Cresswell though it was wise to keep away from the banks. “Lady Eleanor” headed back to Neyland, but we and the Birds turned up the Cleddau River and found a lovely sheltered cove under Benton Castle for the night. Robin Wearn in “Mouette” was already anchored there. Rob had been worried that there was something wrong with the engine for the last few miles and on lifting it out he found some fishing netting caught round the propeller which was easily removed. We spent some time that evening planning our mega trip from Milford Haven to Padstow. We needed to be prepared to leave at any time during the week when the weather was good enough: there were several lows lurking around.

We were up at 7.15 on Monday morning intending to explore the Daugleddau River before returning to Neyland. It was calm and sunny and beautiful. Sesile oaks lined the banks, and although they were quite tall trees, the upper leaves appeared as a smooth, undulating blanket from the river. There were many shelduck around, with families of babies which dived under water when we got near and popped up like little corks all over the place. There was the occasional house nestled in the trees, and when we got in sight of the houses of Haverford West, we turned and with the wind behind retraced our steps to Neyland marina. We arrived just in time for Roy’s briefing for the day at 11 am. The latest weather forecast from the marina office indicated that Wednesday might be possible for our dash to Padstow.

The fleet was splitting up today, with the option of visiting various bays for lunch. The wind was moderate in the Sound with strong puffs, and we left in the company of Ian Fisher (“Black Sheep”) heading for Angle Bay six miles away. We anchored quite close to the rocky shore and decided to have a couple of hours lazing on board in the sun. Roy and Ellie anchored next to us with a similar idea. Other Shrimper crews had gone ashore to a nearby pub. There were several students dotted along the shore. They were surveying the shore by taking down data from marked metre squares. The tide was going down, and after a while we had to re-anchor as we started bumping the rocks below.

That evening the plan was to meet up at the entrance to the Pembroke River. This meant a short sail back up the Sound not far from the marina but on the south side. It was low tide, and twelve or so of us snaked our way up the winding river, mud flats on either side of us. Pembroke Castle, the birthplace of Henry VIII, slowly crept into view. We were to spend the night moored in the Castle Pool at the foot of the castle. Between us and the Pool was a lock. This was used to keep the level of water in the pool constant and to stop the lower parts of the town flooding. We had to wait for the lock and bridge to open at 7.30. By now the numbers of Shrimpers was rapidly increasing to fifteen or so. The anchoring ground just outside the lock was poor causing a lot of shifting and bumping about under motor - the drinks came out! While we waited we got news that the two Crabbers, Jean and Dave Cornhill in “Winkle Too”, and Trevor Thomas with John Clogg in “Pippin” were on their way up the river. They should have been at Milford Haven for the start of Shrimper week, but their sail across from Ireland had been held up by the bad weather, the same that had caused us such trouble in the Bristol Channel. They had finally made it across, and as they neared us there was a lot of clapping and cheering with the blast from a number of fog horns.

The lock finally opened to allow us over the cill. A near disaster was just averted when Clifford in “Saucy Ann II” was seen trying to motor through before the footbridge had been swung open. Someone on the shore was seen waving frantically trying to attract his attention. Fortunately Clifford realised the danger just in time.



Waiting for the lock to open,
Pembroke Castle

It was a wonderful scene gliding into the Pool in the evening light with the castle walls towering above us. We picked up a buoy, inflated “Bum Chug” and rowed across to join the crowd that had already gathered on “Pippin”. We were plied with drink and well entertained with stories of their adventures. A dozen or so of us later went ashore and had a good meal at the Waterman’s Arms.

Clear blue skies greeted us on Tuesday morning. After breakfast we rowed ashore to visit the loos and get our briefing from Roy. The weather was perfect for the plan to sail out of Milford Haven to visit Skomer Island. It also fitted in well with our own plans to stop off at Dale at the western end of the Sound on the way back from Skomer, ready for a 4 am start for Padstow the next morning. However this idea had to have an abrupt rethink after a chat with Jane and Martin Todd, who had just heard a weather forecast and it was not good. Rob rang Neyland marina and they confirmed that a new low was now due to arrive tomorrow, Wednesday, 7 July, with winds Force 7 - 8. This meant delaying our departure.

In the meantime we were able to enjoy a wonderful trip to Skomer. The gates to the Pool were opened quite early, and we were in the first batch to leave and wend our way back down the Pembroke River. This was now looking very different from the previous evening with a large expanse of water covering the mud. The Sound was calm, but not wishing to be caught out we donned our so called ‘wet weather gear’, remembering how the seas had been when we entered less than a week ago. But out past St. Ann’s Head the sea was calm and blue. In fact there was too little wind and we had to motor a lot of the way. In company with Roy, Bryn, Ian and Barry we rounded the Head and passed Skokholm Island. The fleet was well spread out, and at Skomer some were intending to anchor in the South Haven, and others had decided to sail through Jack Sound. This had to be approached at low tide to avoid rough water and standing waves, and anchor in the North Haven from where they were allowed to go ashore and explore the island.

We headed for the South Haven and as we approached we saw more and more seabirds around the island, and soon the water was buzzing with puffins, guillemots, razorbills and gulls. Entering the bay was quite magical - with towering cliffs all round, steep grassy slopes, nesting burrows and the whole area alive with flying, swimming, chattering birds. We anchored and had our picnic lunch in the company of “La Mouette”, “Clementine” and “Marigold”. Some young gulls seemed to be in the early stages of learning to fly, and had great difficulty landing. There was a family of oyster catchers busy around the rocks at the foot of the cliffs and their strident calls reverberated round the cove drowning out the



other sounds. The dominant species was the puffin. They were everywhere, wings whirring furiously or bobbing about in the water. There were many young ones still without their distinctive bills. A family of seals were pottering about at the entrance to the bay. We stayed several hours mesmerised by the activity and just absorbing and enjoying the vibrancy of the place, every now and then being bombed with a few direct hits!

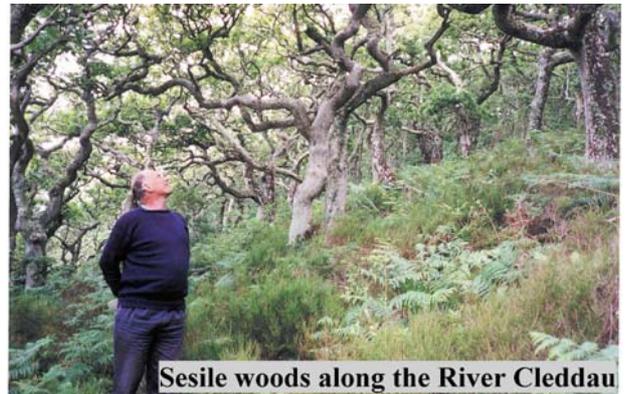
We finally upped anchor and reluctantly left, heading back to Neyland Yacht Haven. We passed the two Fitzgerald boats and Mike and Brian Hopkins on their way to the cove. There was very little wind, and we had to motor most of the way back. Those boats that had been to the north side of Skomer came back later, benefitting from a brisk sailing wind.

Entering the Sound we were able to turn off the motor and as we were close to “La Mouette” and the Greenwood’s “Pyg Ddu” it inevitably became a race. Mike and Sue had not managed to reach Skomer as their engine was a bit dodgy and they couldn’t rely on there being enough wind.

Turning into the marina, the starter rope broke again, this time at the handle, but, after some quick emergency repairs, we got back to the pontoon under motor. Seeing Barry there we arranged to meet him and Carol for a drink in the bar above the marina office after which we returned for eggs and bacon on board and a game of Crepette. It was most unfortunate - it was towards the end of the game when Gillie discovered she had picked up a discarded pile and was using the wrong cards - null and void!

Wednesday, 7th July. The forecast strong wind was beginning to make itself felt. Our plan was to make an early start and with the high tide sail up the Cleddau River branching off into the Carew River to visit Carew Castle. We could only make this a brief visit as the tide turned at 11 am, but we got to the pool by the castle and took some photographs just as the tide was turning. We did not stop but with a strong following wind sailed back down the river. We forgot to look out for a large lump of submerged rock which was shown on the chart close to the junction with the Cresswell River and were very lucky to miss it.

We quickly reached the point where the river joined the Cleddau River where we had decided to stop off at Lawrenny, a little village with a quay close to the junction of the rivers. We had just tied up at the pontoon when Barry and Carol arrived in "Clementine" from the opposite direction. After giving them a hand mooring up, which was tricky with the now strong ebb, we adjourned to the Lawrenny Arms for a drink. Richard Shaw arrived soon after in "Gamba" and they all set off for a 3-mile walk round the peninsular. We had a replay of our 'null and void' Crepette game. Gillie lost! We then set off on the circular walk in the opposite direction to the others, starting through a boatyard where we came across a Shrimper, "Victoria Plum" No.180 looking very smart with a beautiful newly painted red hull. We walked along the Cleddau River through the Sesile oak woods which we had admired during our sailing trip up the river of the morning two days earlier. They had weird twisted trunks and branches, and were quite tall trees under the smooth blanket of leaves that we'd seen from the river. It was a lovely little path up and down and winding its way through the trees. We met and passed the Mellor/Shaw party, and after a while the path led us down along the river shore until we got to the road. It was then about a mile along the road through



Lawrenny village and back to the pub. Near the finish we met Andrew and Tina who were just setting off on the walk. Ben and Gillie had sailed up with them but had decided to go back before the wind rose any more. The last half mile was done at great speed as we wanted to get some soup for lunch before they stopped serving food at the pub. We made the deadline but they didn't provide soup! Christopher Robinson and his boatload were there with Bryn, and we chatted for a while before going down to "Bumble Chugger" to heat up our own soup. When we finally left it was under jib alone with a strong wind blowing.

Back in the marina, Gillie shopped and showered. Rob replaced the engine puller rope and made the acquaintance of Keith Thatcher ("Winkle") who we'd moored up against. He was an ex RNLi boatman and we discovered it was he who had sent us a copy of the photograph he'd found in one of the yachting magazines, which showed us during the Round the Island Race - a brown dot (but you could make out our sail number) in a sea of multi-coloured spinnaker sails all around us. A brilliant photo.

At 7 we met up with Gillie and Ben; Andrew and Tina would follow on when they were ready: we had arranged to have supper together at the Neyland Yacht Club. Robin Wearn and his crew Peter joined us and we had a good evening. The wind was really howling round us as we returned to our boats. We were very glad to have delayed our voyage to Padstow!

Thursday 8th July. Rob got the latest weather information from the office and made an up-to-date sail plan, assuming we could get away the next day, Friday. A big plus to our deferred plans was that we could join in on the barbecue lunch being arranged in Sandy Haven. We would sail from the barbecue to

Dale and spend the night there ready to leave early the next morning. However it was not looking too good for the barbecue weather-wise as it was still blowing hard.

In spite of the howling wind we set off at 11am in company with Ian Fisher and John Clogg in "Black Sheep". It was a really nasty sail down the Sound for 7 miles or so with strong gusts coming down the valleys of the north shore. We were double reefed and with only half the jib, but it was still a real battering sail with a good Force 7 gusting 8 against us. Eventually we reached the top end of the bay with the aid of the engine and it was a great relief to get anchored even though there was little shelter from the wind there. Ian had towed his inflatable (though this had given him problems on the way being flipped upside down), and with the outboard motor attached was able to give us a lift ashore. We headed straight for the shore, to find Barry there waving us away and indicating we should head for the edge of the bay where a stream ran down from the valley. When we turned the corner we could see a crowd of people in a rocky recess on the beach.

Only four boats had sailed round - the other two "Gwendoline" with Bryn and June Bird, and "Anna May" with all four Fitzgeralds aboard. Everyone else had been sensible and had arrived by car - it had certainly been a really uncomfortable sail: even Rob agreed to that! We stepped ashore wet through and still buffeted by the wind. However we found the barbecue set up in a lovely sheltered spot and were given a big welcome. Rhodda Hoy came over with reviving glasses of wine which were most acceptable. Roy and Ellie had gone to a huge amount of trouble. Little barbecues had been set up amongst the rocks all round the area. We had been told to take our own meat or fish and plates and cutlery, but they had provided everything else - there were salads and sauces and French sticks and butter set out on a table, and there were baked potatoes cooking on another barbecue. And all this was followed by strawberries and cream, and cheese and biscuits - A REAL FEAST!

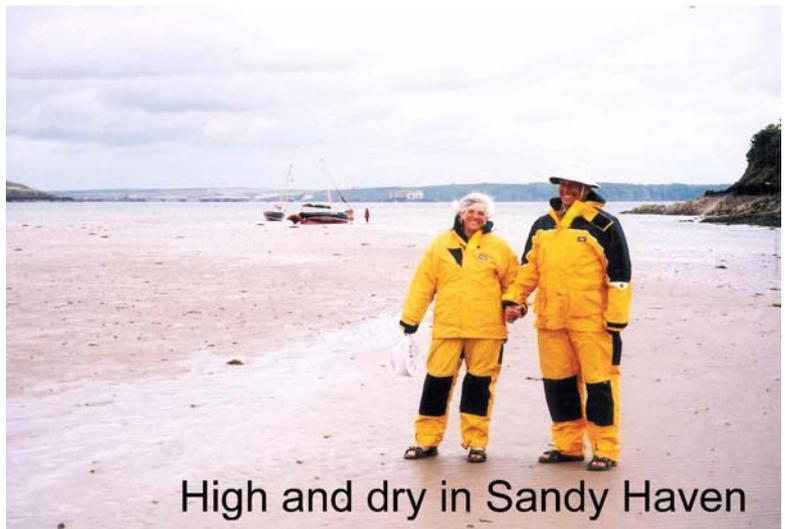


We draped our wet clothes over some rocks near a fire to dry, and found a barbecue with space on it for our steaks. It was so warm and calm and a very enjoyable gathering. Roy's prayer had been answered that *it wouldn't rain on his barbecue* - the threatening black rain clouds held off until everything had been packed away. In fact Roy had been amazingly lucky all week, with the bad weather clearing up just before the start, so he was able to show off the Milford Haven scenic area at its best.

At 4.30pm it was time to don our wet weather gear again and head for the boats. We said our 'thank you's and goodbyes, and it was wonderful how kind everyone was with their good wishes for the rest of our voyage, and invitations from those living near our route to drop in on our way for a meal, a bed or a shower.

We carried Ian's dinghy down and round the corner, but found there was no need for it as a great expanse of sand greeted us. And in fact our plans for moving on to Dale were well and truly thwarted - only about a foot of water surrounded "Bumble Chugger". The Fitzgeralds were already there tugging and pushing "Anna May", but without success. Ian was anchored a little further out and he took off at a run and, with a lot of effort and help from the others, just managed to get "Black Sheep" off and was away, having retrieved John and the dinghy. So the rest of us had to be patient with a wait of 4 hours before we would be afloat again. June and Bryn had anchored up the little stream but they also had the same problem.

Gillie Fitzgerald brewed up mugs of tea which were handed round, and then we all went off on separate walks. We went back up to the barbecue area, which was now completely deserted with no signs of the recent activity, and across the stepping stones to the beach on the other side of the stream. We chatted with a man in a house at the edge of the water, and watched his brother-in-law who was exercising his horse in a circle on the sand.



We returned to the boat to listen to the 6pm weather forecast, and had a cup of tea at a rather uncomfortable angle, as the water very very slowly crept up and started lapping round the hull. By 8pm we were just afloat, and with the wind much moderated we set off for Dale, with final farewell waves to the Fitzgeralds. The water was still very bumpy, and even tucked into Dale Bay we still rolled about a lot, but it was the best we could do. We got everything ready for the morning, with the lunch made and a goody box set up with nibbles, and settled down for a rather short night.

It was sad to be missing the last day of Shrimper Week, and especially the mystery coach tour and the farewell dinner, but we were leaving Milford Haven with happy memories of an excellent week.

With apologies to “Taffy

(Read out at the farewell dinner)

Roy was not a Welshman,
 Roy was not a Thief,
 Roy set up the Shrimper Week
 And led with strong belief.

He led us up the Cleddau,
 He led us out to sea,
 We saw the birds at Skomer:
 A lovely place to be.

Razorbills and puffins,
 Many hundreds in the sun.
 Gulls and gannets and the seals:
 A sight for everyone.

He led us to the castles,
 He led us to the beer,
 He showed us all of Milford
 Sound
 And kept us full of cheer.

Roy and Ellie have done us
 proud,
 We thank them from afar.
 We may have reached a distant
 shore,
 Perhaps a Padstow bar.