

2009 Mid Solent Mini Cruise

When I contacted Robin Wearn about joining the Solent and Chichester SOA August 'Mini Cruise' he asked rather cryptically if I was able to lower my mast. I have done it a couple of times before towing the boat, so I said yes, and that seemed to be the end of the matter. Robin is a very well organized sort of chap and had produced a matrix showing boats, crew, and which bits of the cruise they would be attending. My crew on this occasion was to be Bill Anderson. If you are on a mountain with planks on your feet Bill always knows which way to go, and if you are at sea he always knows what the tide is doing, which can be very useful. We had a passage plan for sailing from Poole to Yarmouth. The idea was to arrive at Hurst at low water and catch the flood to take us into the harbour in time for supper. In the event we had a very powerful wind on the quarter, quite a bit of green stuff over the side, and a wildly inaccurate log registering in the upper sevens!

The result of all this was that we arrived at Hurst two hours early with a spring tide still on the ebb. We considered anchoring for a while or sailing backwards and forwards, but in the end we decided to go for it. We sailed along the shingle bank and swung round to port into the narrows. The dubious log shot up to eight knots, and the rig was straining in the wind, but looking across at the stone walls of the castle we seemed to be poised in midstream and almost motionless. After the swell in the bay the water was very swift but strangely flat. Eventually we started to edge forward and gradually gather speed over the ground as the channel got wider.



When we arrived at Yarmouth the Berthing Master very kindly found us a pontoon connected to the shore next to the showers. The

next day, after a good breakfast in town we sailed up Southampton Water to meet the main group at Hythe Marina Village. The marina has a lock at the entrance to maintain a constant level around the houses, most of which have their own berths. We were all invited to drinks at David and Jean Cornhill's house, after which we had a very pleasant supper at the La Vista restaurant.

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The next day we all drifted very slowly down Southampton Water. As soon as we lowered sail and started our engines to go up the Hamble a useful little breeze sprang up. Karen on *Claire* (407) thought it was too good to miss and showed us all up by sailing the whole way to our berths at the Elephant Boatyard.

This was where the mast lowering bit came in. Robin had a plan for us to go up under the various bridges to the Horse and Jockey at Curbridge. I soon realized that I could lower my mast, but if I did, the mast, gaff, and boom would be all over the cockpit and I would not be able to steer. Some of the others were more adequately equipped to overcome this problem so it was decided that we would divide the party up to go in four boats.

Trevor Thomas (*Gentle Breeze* - 786) seemed to have been at work with tide tables, sine tables and bridge heights. He had worked out a very cunning plan for going under the bridges with his mast at 45 degrees, but this involved setting off at half tide, so he left early.

When Robin said it was time to go the other three Shrimpers set off and soon cleared the assorted bridges. As we rounded a bend the river widened right out and we saw *Gentle Breeze*, apparently at anchor. Robin thought he would have a chat with Trevor and headed towards him. Very soon we were aground, but as time passed the river slowly filled up and we were able to proceed in a series of bumps and starts.



A somewhat piratical-looking crew deployed two inflatables from *Gentle Breeze* and set off up the right hand channel of the river. As the three Shrimpers motored along, the river got narrower and narrower and more overgrown along the banks. It reminded me of Joseph Conrad and the river voyage in the *Heart of Darkness*. Luckily there were no spears and there was just enough tide to get us up to a tiny landing stage in the pub garden.

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So there we were, three Shrimpers – *La Mouette*, *Lost Society*, and *Dreamtime*, and three tenders, floating in a patch of knee-deep water. We had about half an hour before the tide started going out again, so there was a rush to the bar and a rapid speech from Trevor before we set off back and down to the Elephant.

From our berth we could see two possibilities for supper. There was the Jolly Sailor and there was a little restaurant next to the boatyard. Clifford and Mike (*Saucy Ann* - 705) were organizing a party to the little restaurant, which they said was very good. After a very pleasant evening I can say they were certainly proved right.



The next day there was a walking expedition and a visit to another waterside pub, before we sailed across to Ashlett Creek, where there was time for a few more drinks before setting off for Newtown.

By this time the fleet consisted of *La Mouette*, *Gentle Breeze*, *Little Auk*, *Lost Society*, *Redwing*, *Winkle*, and *Triplet*.

There was a pleasant little beat round Calshot and down the West Solent with the usual excitement of a large vessel manoeuvring round Bramble Bank. Bill's sixth sense for tides must have been working well as we were the first boat to sail into Newtown Creek, as Robin motored ahead to look at the anchorage.

Clamerkin Lake did not look very inviting. There was a very cool breeze coming off the Solent and the holding did not seem to be very good.

Trevor went off to see if he could find somewhere else. He found a good spot further upstream near the Western Haven and reported back to Robin.

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So we de-camped to the little bay by Lower Hamstead Farm and I found myself anchored a few yards from the spot where a rat had bored a hole through my daughter's tent to steal a half-eaten baguette. When the present occupants of the farm took over, they decided not to continue with the camp site, which is great loss for those with Swallows and Amazons tendencies.

Possibly Robin is one of that number, as he gave us strict instructions that this was to be a self-sufficiency cooking on board evening with no sneaking off to the New Inn. We were all happy to comply, and we went to sleep to the sound of Oyster Catchers, Curlews, and excited Canada Geese flying up and down the creek. The next day was a dawn start for *Triplet*, *Winkle*, and *Lost Society* as we were all heading for Hurst Narrows before the flood. We motored out over a glassy creek and an equally glassy West Solent. Just short of Hengistbury, we got a proper breeze and had a very pleasant sail back to Poole.

Mike Shearman (*Triplet* – 815)

