

Bumbling on the River Dart 23 June – 30 June 2012

Saturday, 23rd June. After a very enjoyable Shrimper week with over ninety boats at Falmouth we set off by car to Totnes with boat in tow to explore the River Dart. We had arranged to meet up with our daughter, Lucy and her husband with their two daughters aged three and one.

We arrived at Steamer Quay on the east side of the river a little after High Water and had just enough time to rig and launch Bumble Chugger (BC) before it was too low to use that slipway. We then drove the car and trailer over the bridge and down the west bank of the river to Baltic Wharf, just opposite Steamer Quay, where we arranged to leave the car and trailer for the week. A very helpful Sue took our details and showed us where we could park. We returned to BC via the shops and the garage for petrol, and called in at the Totnes Sailing Association compound where Jon and Marie Davies had arrived with 'Flete Lady' (Shrimper 402). They gave us tea and biscuits and hoped to meet up later in the week.

It started to rain as we set off chugging down the river. Rain and high winds were forecast for the night, so after about half a mile we found a spot on a wooded corner that seemed fairly sheltered and dropped anchor. It was soon cosy in the cabin. It was calm when we went to bed, but the wind and rain arrived as promised and we had a good battering through the night, with about one and a half inches of rain.

Sunday, 24th June. The rain and wind had eased and we set off sailing down the Dart in a puffy wind. The river is most beautiful, a mixture of wooded banks and hilly green fields rising up above the trees: we decided the cows must have trouble grazing on such steep slopes! We later discovered that the sides of the hills had stepped pathways worn by the cows. There were swans, ducks, geese, egrets and we saw several buzzards hovering over the fields.

We reached Dittisham by lunch time and tied up on a pontoon. It was reserved for dinghies, but there was nowhere else for us to go without picking up a buoy and there was plenty of space. We walked ashore and ordered drinks from the waterside Ferry Boat Inn - rather reminiscent of The Butt and Oyster at Pin Mill on the East coast. At the bench outside we got talking to a fascinating man with his son and lurcher dog. He was full of interesting sailing stories and he knew the East coast well. Suddenly he pointed to our boat - the Harbour Pilot had tied himself up to BC and was about to tow her away. Rob shot down the long pontoon, shouting and waiving his arms! Our friend at the pub thought we were doomed to pay a £60 fine as the Harbour Master was known for being

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unrelenting, but Rob managed to talk him round and we were let off with a warning.

After lunch we motored across the river and picked up a mooring just upstream of Greenway, Agatha Christie's house. It was next to another shrimper 'Saffron' (222) and we had a short chat with Robert Griffiths and his wife before rowing to the shore. There was quite a steep climb up to the house at the top of the hill with its wonderful glimpsed views of the river far below. Not a very



attractive house from the outside, but inside it was a fascinating place, full of treasures, beautiful china, pictures and artefacts, but still retaining a homely, lived in feeling. The sun had come out, and while Rob relaxed under the main portico, I went for a walk through the grounds. I went down to the boathouse and the battery - winding paths through fine trees with lovely views of the river. The place must look magnificent in the spring with azaleas and bluebells in bloom.

We had planned to spend the night at Stoke Gabriel, but it was rather shallow and exposed to wind and waves. We found a sheltered spot almost back at Dittisham, and spent a comfortable evening and night. Rob won a Black Jack challenge.

Monday, 25th June. We sailed down to Dartmouth with a gentle breeze - the weather was so much better than the forecast had led us to believe. At the Dartmouth Yacht Club we tied up on their pontoon and were welcomed in and given the code for their facilities. We explored the town and at the Tourist Information Office found a replica of an operating atmospheric steam engine, invented by Newcom, a local Dartmouth man. It was interesting trying to understand how it worked.

We returned to the Yacht Club for a drink and lunch on board BC. Another Shrimper was tied up on the pontoon - 'Kittiwake' (722), and we had a chat with Ruth and Tim Tayler. We were due to meet up with Wendy and Mike Hopkins, owners of 'Lulabelle' (562) for a meal at the Ferry Boat Inn, so we returned up the river and picked up a visitor's buoy near the pontoon. A long fraught tussle with Scrabble - both ending up with 286 points!

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At 6.45 we rowed to the pontoon - quite a hard trip against the whooshing tide. Mike had booked a table for us and we had the best table by the window overlooking the river. Soon Mike and Wendy arrived with Fritz (their basset hound). Fritz received a huge welcome from Rob! The rain started soon, but in the snug pub we enjoyed a very delicious meal - excellent fish pies and Madras curry. The rain really poured down and we were expecting to get soaked on our way back, but after our coffee there was a pause in the rain, and we just got back to BC before it started again. Lulled to sleep with the rain pattering on the roof.

Tuesday, 26th June. We woke to thick mist and mirk - and could barely see the boats moored around us. A slow start with crosswords and Sudoku, and then a chug down to Dartmouth to visit the Yacht Club, where we stayed most of the morning looking at papers and magazines. We watched the low clouds and fog slowly disappear until we could just see the entrance to the river and out to sea.

At midday we set off to visit Dartmouth Castle by foot - not good timing as the rain started just as we left, and we arrived at the castle after a 20 minute walk rather wet. We had our National Trust cards at the ready but found it was an English Heritage site. A very persuasive man encouraged us to join English Heritage, and we finally gave in and became members. It was a really interesting and enjoyable trip round the castle. We also visited the Petrox Church next door, which was simple and impressive.



The rain had stopped by the time we started our return walk back into the town. We had a late lunch time drink in the club and lunch on board BC before setting off for a short sail out to sea. The castle looked good from the water, and we found the spot on the opposite bank from where a great chain used to be stretched across the river mouth and raised when enemy ships were entering the river, trapping them while the cannons from the castle peppered them with cannon balls. We were returning into the river when the huge George Town yacht arrived from Falmouth, and moored up opposite the Town Quay its mast towering above all the others.

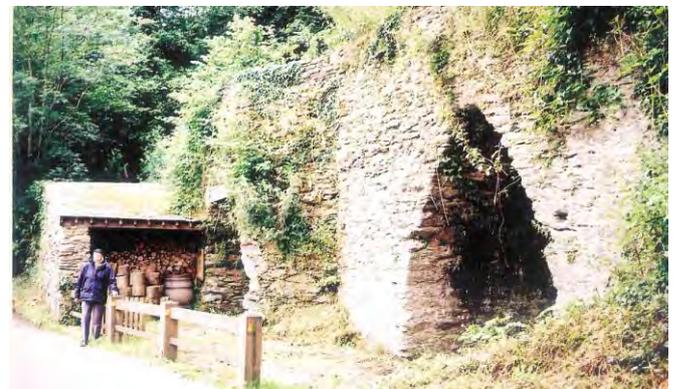
We returned to a buoy at Dittisham for the night. A very satisfactory game of Black Jack. 5 love to me!

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Wednesday, 27th June. A gentle sail up the river with the rising tide and into Bow Creek. As on other days, the cadets from the Naval College were out in their patrol vessels doing exercises up and down the river. Quite young lads, 8 or so aboard each boat, one at the bow and one at the stern cradling very real looking guns, and incongruously waving to us as we passed!



It was just deep enough for us to follow the winding channel up to the pontoon outside the Maltsters Arms. There we had arranged to meet up with Tigs (Lucy), Ben, Sophie and Libby for lunch. We had arrived rather early and decided to explore along the road, passing some extinct lime burning kilns. It was a beautiful area between the river and the hills but not brilliant weather with the rain coming and going.



We waited in the bar of the Maltsters Arms. The family arrived soon after noon and we had lots of news to catch up on over beers and a soup lunch. Then we all set off in BC.

We chugged out of the creek and with sail set, Ben helmed us down river to Dartmouth and out to sea to admire the castle and cliffs. Back into the river past all the million pound residences with their very pricey yachts moored in the harbour. One of the cadet patrols shouted at us and warned us of an outbreak of cholera, and told us to keep clear!

Back at Dittisham we landed Tigs and family on the pontoon and picked up a buoy. We rowed ashore and met up with them at the Ferry Boat Inn. Some fairly hilarious games of Black Jack, which included making a bit of a mess with a spilt beer. A couple of couples left, but we don't think we were the cause, as they seemed to be entertained watching Sophie and Libby enjoying themselves. Then reverse manoeuvres getting back on board BC and onto the mooring. A thick mist was settling down and quite soon even the nearest boats were ghostly shapes.

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The tent was set up and the children's bed made in the cockpit well, Rob cooked us a fine supper of eggs, bacon, fried bread, new potatoes and corn followed by mocha slice and heavenly cake. Libby was asleep by the time we were eating. Sophie enjoyed chatting to us in the cabin until she started drooping and joined Libby in the well. The two of them looked very cosy and comfy tucked up together.

We all settled down for the night in the quiet stillness of the mist, to be woken up in the early hours of the morning by the most tremendous thunder storm. Huge crashings of thunder rumbled round us and continuous lightning lit up the sky.

After a while the rain arrived, deluging down, pounding on the boat. Fortunately the tent did a good job protecting us, and amazingly the children slept soundly right the way through it!

Thursday, 28th June. All was calm in the morning and we headed up the river with a gentle wind. Diverting to explore Galmpton Creek we found ourselves stuck on the mud. Rob at once tried out his kedging skills, jumping into 'Bum Chug' and rowing the anchor to the stern of the boat, so we could pull ourselves off using the line. Worked a treat and we were afloat almost immediately, though Tigs made the impolite comment that we were a lot lighter with Dad's weight off the boat!

On to Totnes where we moored at Baltic Wharf, visiting the loos and doing some food shopping in the town. Tigs was at the helm when we set off down river again in a strengthening wind. She sailed with real gusto, bouncing about and treating BC like a Topper! At Stoke Gabriel we chugged up the muddy creek towards the town, and picked up a buoy while we had our lunch. We didn't stay



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long as it was not very sheltered, and with the tide falling it was time to motor into Bow Creek and back to The Maltsters Arms, to tie up at their pontoon before it dried out.

From there we set off on an expedition up the river in 'Bum Chug' and the canoe to find the Waterside Pub, but there was not enough water to get very far. We then went a little way down stream and up a small tributary towards Tuckenhay. Again we couldn't get very far and returning it was quite hard to make headway against the tide and the wind.



We got the tent set up and while cooking pasta for the children's tea, the boat suddenly did a big topple which gave us all a bit of a jump! Rob and Ben got a rope round the mast and tied it to a tree on the shore pulling us upright, so we were nice and stable for the night. We were having take-away fish and chips for our supper, and while it was being cooked we had a drink in The Maltsters, tucked away in a side room where our antics wouldn't disturb other drinkers. Good game of dominoes, and then down to BC for our fish and chips. Another cosy night tucked up on board.

Friday, 29th June. We were hard aground in the morning, and while we waited for the water to come in, we set off for a walk down the road and across the fields running along the river. It should have been a circular walk, but it got a bit too muddy and hilly so we retraced our steps. Making plans for the rest of the day, we decided to get the boat out at Baltic Wharf as soon as we could, and meet up at Totnes Steam Engine Station to catch the 1 o'clock train to Buckfastleigh.

At 11 o'clock we were just afloat and able to scrape and bump our way out down the creek. Back on the Dart the tide was against us and we motored as there was a strong wind heading us. It took us until 12 to get to Baltic Wharf and we realised that we were going to be pushed for time. On our arrival we were told we would have to wait 40 minutes while they launched two big yachts. A bit of persuasion and they agreed to let us have a gap between the two boats. In the meantime we dashed as fast as we could to the office at the other end of the quay to collect the car keys. A quick run back and we got the boat out in record time!

Gillie & Robin Whittle – *Bumble Chugger* (124)