

Poole - Falmouth - Poole International Shrimper Week 2012
Mike Shearman (*Triplet 815*)

Tuesday 12 June

At two thirty in the morning it can be surprisingly dark, even in the weeks each side of the Summer Solstice. As we motored out of Parkstone Yacht Haven there was just enough scattered light from the shore to see our way out of the marina and into the North Channel, where we picked up the flashes of the red and green buoys curving into the distance. There was no sign at all of the hundreds of yachts and other craft which were moored all around us, so it seemed prudent to keep strictly to the channel. When we thought we were somewhere near the Royal Motor Yacht Club we called up Christopher Froehlich (*Trista 752*) who was joining us, and after a few minutes we caught sight of his masthead light coming towards us out of the gloom. We exchanged a few shouted greetings and headed for the Harbour Entrance. Then it was past the deserted chain ferry and into the Swash Channel.

By this time we were a long way past Passage Plan A. As soon as I heard that the International Shrimper Week was to be in Falmouth I decided that I might as well sail there. My long suffering friend Bill was willing to come along, so we set aside a week to get there, a week in Falmouth and a week to get back. Nearer the time we heard that Julian Biggs (*Coco - Crabber 22*) was organising a convoy with Christopher Froelich and Karen Macey (*Camaron 940*) so we thought we would join them. Julian's plan was to meet at Portland on the 12th of June, sail to Dartmouth on the 13th, Fowey on the 15th, and Falmouth on the 16th.

Close to the time of departure we heard that Karen did not feel that her new boat was ready for the trip. Then on Monday the 11th we had a message from Julian to say that his boat had suffered some serious storm damage in the Solent and he was returning to Bosham for repairs. Bill and I decided to carry on, and when we phoned Christopher, who was going single handed, he decided to come with us. The weather forecasts looked good for Tuesday the 12th, OK for the 13th but really dire for the rest of the week, so we decided to get as far as we could in the first two days. We would start early to get a favourable tide, give Portland a miss, go straight to Dartmouth, and see how it went.

Heading southwards, we left the lights of the Swash Channel astern and passed Old Harry, Peveril Point and Durlstone Head. Our navigation equipment consisted of three sets of A3 size Tough Charts, Reeds Channel Almanac and a Garmin hand held GPS. A phone call to the Lulworth Range Office had given me a waypoint which would take us clear of St Alban's Head and the Inner Gunnery Range.

With a very useful northerly breeze we soon found ourselves passing the buoys which mark the eastern side of St Alban's Ledge and soon after the waypoint, where we changed course for Dartmouth. Then it was the long slog across Lyme Bay. Poole to Portland is 28 Nm and Portland to Dartmouth is 45 Nm, roughly 75 Nm in total. Sailing into the middle of the bay there was no land in sight and apart from Gannets, not much to look at. We kept ourselves going with snacks and drinks. Every three hours we would listen to the Coastguard weather reports. Christopher had a very good tiller pilot so he would disappear from time to time leaving "George" in charge. The two boats seemed to be very evenly matched in terms of speed so we were able to keep more or less together the whole way across.



Bill in the rain

About ten miles out of Dartmouth the wind died and it started to rain. We soon found out that motor sailing in the rain is not a hugely enjoyable pastime, but we plodded on, and in the end, at around 8pm, we found ourselves in the entrance. Dartmouth is a very pretty town and we were well received at the Darthaven Marina in Kingswear. This lifted our spirits considerably. We had not met Christopher properly before, so it was a good opportunity to shake hands and celebrate our arrival.

After a shower and some supper we had a think about the next day. The forecast seemed to indicate a northerly breeze in the morning but rain and very little wind in the afternoon. When planning a trip of more than 12 hours it is best to time it so that you have two tides in your favour and one in the middle against. It looked as if we could be stuck with no wind and a contrary tide after the first six hours. After our experience the previous day, motoring at near full throttle for 12 hours in the rain did not seem to be a very attractive option. We could stop over in Newton Ferrers or Plymouth but if the weather was going to be as bad as the forecast we might be there for two or three days. So the only thing to do was to catch a favourable tide in the morning and see how far we could go.

Wednesday 13th June

At around 0800 we motored out and set off southwards. In spite of the fact that we had a neap tide it was a bit lumpy going round Start Point but we were soon going westwards with the wind on the beam. We still had a good wind off Newton Ferrers so we carried on, leaving the Great Mewstone well to starboard and the Eddystone Lighthouse close by on the port side. The breeze was still holding up well when we passed Hand Deeps buoy at around 4 pm, so it was decision time. All the forecasts were still predicting some very nasty weather on the following day. Fowey was some 15 Nm away (4hrs). We could get there before dark but there is no marina so we could be stuck on a buoy or pontoon for some time. Falmouth was about 30 Nm distant (8 hrs) but we would have to find our way to the marina in darkness. We had a brief discussion with Christopher and decided to press on to Falmouth.

The wind died at around 8 pm, so we had to motor for the last four hours or so. From this direction there were lots of lights on the shore but none that were obviously for navigational purposes, so we had to rely on the GPS and looking at the silhouette of the shoreline to locate the entrance. Eventually we found ourselves between the St Anthony Head lighthouse and the Black Rock buoy. Very soon there were red and green channel markers going off in all directions with the Inner Harbour to port, St Mawes to starboard and the Carrick Roads ahead. Shining a torch on the chart and counting the flashes Bill began to unravel which buoys we were looking at while I steered and kept an eye on the GPS, making sure that we kept inside the black zone which indicated deep water in the Carrick Roads and the River Fal. When we got to the section where the channel turns to starboard at Cross Road we located the Northbank buoy and from there we could see the channel markers for the Fairway leading into Mylor Yacht Haven. At this point we noticed that Christopher was following us very closely indeed. Using a big torch to spot moored craft we slowly eased up the Fairway to the Yacht Haven and soon found some empty visitors' berths on the outer pontoon. At around 12.30 we tied up, heaved a sigh of relief and hit the sack. We had sailed about 70 Nm in 16.5 hours, arriving in Mylor some 46 hours after leaving Poole – not particularly fast – but we were where we wanted to be and Christopher would be able to pick up his hire car and install himself and Catherine who was arriving by train, in their B&B.

Thursday 14th June

Later on we got up and had a look round to see if we could spot any fellow Shrimpers. As it was still only Thursday we were rather early for the event and the only boat that I recognised was *Sweet Pea (992)*, which was tied up on the inside of the outer pontoon, but there was no sign of her owners. The Harbour Master found us and directed us to a snug berth in the middle of the Marina. This was just as well, as after a few hours, just as forecast, it started to blow in a big way. I don't know how strong the wind was, but I can say that the outer pontoons were covered in spray and twisting enough to make walking or even standing up very hazardous. So Bill and I spent the rest of the day exploring, shopping and sorting out the boat.

Friday 15th June

A few people were arriving by car and launching their boats, but it was too windy for any serious sailing, so we decided to go across to Falmouth. Having walked round the coast to Flushing, we located the ferry but found that it was closed for lunch. This turned out to be a very lucky chance as there was a restaurant on the ferry quay which provided each of us with a superb plate of fish and chips and salad. In fact Bill went so far as to say that it was the best that he had ever had. As we boarded the ferry the skipper remarked that the weather was close to the limit for safe operation and we might have to find an alternative way back. Falmouth is great for shopping and the Maritime Museum well worth a visit. From the top floor we could look down on the huge sailing ships which were moored alongside for the J Class Regatta. Taking the bus back we found that we were the only passengers and the driver very kindly dropped us off near the Yacht Haven.

Saturday 16th June

It was still very windy and more Shrimpers, including lots of old friends, were arriving by car. We went to the launderette and checked in with Mark Osborn, who was organising the event from his camper van. There was a big wedding at Mylor church and there were chaps in Cornish kilts playing Cornish bagpipes on the quay. Sitting at one of the long tables in the Mylor Harbour Cafe we fell into conversation with two of the guests, Anna and Gary, who told us that they lived in Gweek at the top of the Helford River (more of them later). In the evening there was a briefing at Restronguet Sailing Club and dinner at the Castaways Restaurant.



Portscatho

Sunday 17th June

By this time the wind had abated enough for us to take part in the first event of the week. A large contingent of Shrimpers sailed out of the harbour and northwards up the coast to Portscatho where we anchored for lunch. There was a fairly uncomfortable chop out there so Bill and I decided not to join the hardy souls who were going ashore in inflatables and had our lunch on board. Later in the afternoon the wind went light and fluky, so most of us ended up motoring back to Mylor.

Monday 18th June

At this point the weather intervened again. In the official programme a visit to Helford River, which we particularly wanted to see, was scheduled for Thursday, when all the forecasts were indicating more gales. We looked at the tides and decided to take our chance while we could. A few others had taken the same decision, so there was quite a fleet heading out west round Rosemullion Head. As we entered the estuary there was a general dispersal as we went our separate ways to explore. Having sailed my Cornish Coble in the Helford some years before, I was surprised to see how many boats were on moorings off Helford Passage, but we managed to pick a way through and headed up to Frenchman's Creek for a bit tranquillity. Having taken in some of the Du Maurier ambience we came out of the narrow and tree-lined inlet and back to the 21st century to have a good look at the tide table. If we set off straight away we could get up to Gweek on the flood, grab a pint, and come out on the ebb. The winding channel up to Gweek is buoyed but at Mawgan one of the buoys was so far off on our port beam that we totally failed to see it and swiftly came to a halt on the bottom. Having sorted that one out we continued on to the final stretch up to the village where we were surprised to find that the port and starboard buoys were almost in a straight line! Luckily Bill and I are used to slalom courses and we soon

found ourselves at the top of the creek. Finding somewhere to go ashore proved to be a problem. First of all we tried a deserted and crumbling stone quay on the north side, but after threading our way through rotting boats and rusting trailers we found that we were trapped on the wrong side the Seal Sanctuary security fence. No way out there, so it was back on board to take a look at the boatyard. Gweek boatyard is on a peninsular with tightly packed moored craft on every side and no obvious place to tie up at all. As we gingerly started up a narrow channel on the north side there was a sudden shout from above. We were very surprised to find that it was Anna, the wedding guest, calling down from one of the moored craft. She told us to turn round, tie up and come aboard, which we were very pleased to do. We soon found that she and Gary work and live on Blue Linnet, a converted 60 ft wooden herring drifter. After a brief tour, Bill and I headed off to the pub for a quick pint of Doom Bar, as planned. We would have liked to stay longer, but having sampled the channel, did not fancy being stuck on a falling tide, so it was back aboard and a wave goodbye to our unexpected hosts.



Blue Linnet

We had nowhere in particular to go, so we decided to spend the night somewhere in the river. There was a fair bit of breeze, so we looked for somewhere in the lee of the oaks that line much of shore. In the end we found a very peaceful spot up Polwheveral Creek where there were no houses and no moored craft, just herons and egrets in the trees above. We anchored in 10 ft of water and calculated that we would just about stay afloat. There was a bit of a racket as some helicopters from Culdrose buzzed around, but eventually Prince William and his buddies went off to do good somewhere else. We had supper and turned in.



Polwheveral Creek

Tuesday 19th June

I woke up at around 0200 to find that I was lying against the side of the boat and that Bill had drifted down onto the centreboard case. Apparently we had taken ground on a bit of a slope. Obviously our tide calculation had been slightly optimistic. No real worries, and after a while we floated back onto an even keel. We had breakfast and enjoyed the tranquillity of the creek, the only disturbance being the odd croak of an egret and a shoal of small but very athletic fish leaping out of the water. We had a peaceful sail back to Mylor then on upstream to Trelissick Gardens. For some reason the National Trust pontoon is about half a mile down from the entrance and is not attached to the shore, so we had to drag out the inflatable canoe. The advert for my canoe talks about navigating the length of the Amazon but I reckon that if it is true it must have been done with the help of a towrope with a pretty good powerboat at the other end. No-one who has tried to paddle this thing has been able to go more than about three yards before it veers round and goes back the other way. Paddling half a mile was out of the question so we looped our way to the shore and hid the canoe in the trees. After an almost vertical ascent through dense scrub we found the path and headed off to present our NT cards. As usual the Trust café provided a very civilised lunch which we ate in bright sunshine. After a tour of the gardens we went back to the canoe which by now was almost afloat as the tide had risen right up to the tangle of roots where we had left it. Having looped our way back, we chatted to people on the pontoon, explored the river a bit, then headed off to the Pandora Inn at Restronguet for supper. This is the only place I know where you can have a very decent meal at a table on a pontoon right next to your boat.

Wednesday 20th June

Having missed the visit to St Just in Roseland we had a very cunning plan to get there without using the canoe. We sailed to St Mawes and on up to the top of the Percuil River where we went aground and anchored. We were going to roll up our trousers, walk to the shore and take a fairly short walk over land to St Just. Before setting off I leaned over the side to poke the bottom with the boathook. The entire extended shaft disappeared into several feet of soft mud. Suddenly walking to the shore did not seem to be such a good idea so we brewed some tea and waited for the tide to float us off. After lunch we thought we would rejoin the official programme which

indicated a cream tea and barbeque at the Smugglers Inn. By mid-afternoon it was pouring with rain. After a quick detour to retrieve my hat, which I had left the previous day at Trelissick, we headed for the Smugglers pontoon. The staff at the Inn were all ready to receive hundreds of hungry Shrimpers, but by this time the rain was so bad that the only boats on the pontoon were *Triplet*, *Antea* (242 - Gerd Koenig and Karin Somfleth) and two Shrimpers from Holland. The Inn had rigged up a canvas awning for the bar and barbeque which provided enough shelter for us to remove our oilies. A very nice young lady at the bar had no difficulty at all in persuading us to buy a cream tea and tickets for the barbeque. In view of the weather we had our tea and supper in the Inn and over the course of the evening several more participants turned up by car to join in. Feeling quite mellow and rather well fed we motored back to Mylor with *Antea* for company.

Thursday 21st June

As promised it was very windy and we were all allowed to stay at Mylor. Apart from taking a look at the church and going to Mylor Bridge for provisions we did not do very much.

Friday 22nd June

Still very windy – so Christopher and Catherine suggested a trip to Trerice, a National Trust property near Newquay. Gerd and Karin came too and kindly gave us a lift in their car. Trerice is one of the more homely Trust properties and well worth a visit. On the way back Karin kept stopping to buy plants until the back of the car looked like a mobile conservatory. In the evening there was a dinner and prizegiving at the Princess Pavilion in Falmouth.

Saturday 23rd June

I was time to head for home. The weather looked OK, but the forecast for the night looked pretty bad. Christopher had things to sort out so we could not leave until around midday. This was no bad thing as we were able to have few coffees and say goodbye to our friends. Sailing northwards past Dodman Point we reached Fowey in the evening and tied up at the pontoon on the east side, opposite the China Clay works. This one is not connected to the land, but it does give you a chance to stretch your legs and have a chat. In the night, as predicted, it really blew up and the rain came down as if from celestial hosepipes. It got past our cockpit tent and totally soaked the bench cushions which remained sodden for the next two days.

Sunday 24th June

Before catching the tide we had time to motor across to Fowey to perform morning ablutions at the Yacht Club. As a consequence of the gale we could see that the sea was, as you might say, undulating, and it carried on doing that until we reached Dartmouth, where it was back to the Darthaven Marina.

Monday 25th June

It was time for Lyme Bay again and on this occasion the wind was just right for us to hoist our cruising chutes. We a good sail as far as Portland where there was little wind and a foul tide. It was dark as we motored past St Albans Head and as we passed Swanage we could see the Swash Channel lights through the gap between the cliff and Old Harry. As usual the various lights gave a very deceptive impression of our surroundings, but in the end we found our way into the North Channel where we said goodbye to Christopher. At first Parkstone Marina was totally invisible, but I thought I recognised the two red lights at the entrance and we soon found our way in and tied up at my berth at around 0200 on Tuesday, exactly fourteen days from the time of our departure.



Trista in an undulation

I would like to propose a very heartfelt vote of thanks for Mark Osborn and his team. With nearly a hundred boats involved and less than perfect weather, it must have been quite a headache at times, but the programme and venues were terrific. We enjoyed every minute of it.

Mike Shearman (*Triplet 815*)