

Log of Bumble Chugger, 2-4 September 2005

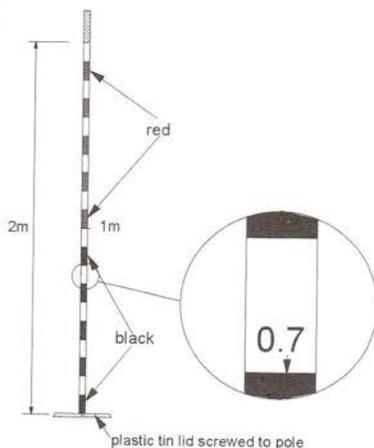
Participants:

Bumble Chugger (124)
Albert (488)
Gwendoline II (823)
Emily Ann (246)

Shy Talk (930)
Peggy (585)
Dulcibella: Crabber 24
Dragonfly trimaran

Walton Backwaters has been made famous through the Arthur Ransome book *Secret Water*. What is so extraordinary about the book is the accuracy of the details and the descriptions. The Backwaters consist of a set of creeks and mud flats nestling in an area just east of Harwich, which lies at the mouth of the estuary of the rivers Stour and Orwell. Much of the islands are set aside as a Nature Reserve providing homes for countless types of sea birds and waders. Seals have settled in great numbers in some of the creeks. It makes an ideal venue for a Shrimper Rally. However, most of the area has not been formally charted and it is difficult to detect the channels in the mud when it is just covered with water. Many of the channels are only navigable at high water.

Prior to the weekend I had prepared some notes and chartlets that would help participants navigate/survey the Backwaters. I had also designed a 2m sounding pole that could be made out of a bamboo stick (see fig.), and circulated the sketch, together with recording sheets, to those interested in doing the survey.



Friday, 2 September: Wind SE 2-3 Sunny HW 1200, LW 1812: At lunchtime we met up at Felixstowe Ferry with John Clogg (who had sailed *Albert* down from Woodbridge). We sailed out with the ebb already in full flow pouring past the jetty at over four knots, and were soon over the Deben bar with a pleasant reaching wind that took us across Felixstowe bay in the sunshine. We tucked into the shore close to Languard Point and were nicely lee-bowed by the current coming out of Harwich Harbour. This took us past Pye End buoy and into the Walton Backwaters channel leading to Stone Point, where we anchored and brewed up a cup of tea.

East Coast Rally in Walton Backwaters

Emily Ann and *Gwendoline* had sailed from the Alde earlier that day. *Emily Ann* had berthed at Titchmarsh Marina for the night but *Gwendoline* was moored off Landermere Quay and agreed to try and join up with us later, although low water was fast approaching. We then set sail up Hamford Water with *Albert* and reached the junction that splits Landermere and Kirby Creeks without problems.

However, as soon as we started to sail up Landermere Creek we both started to touch the mud. Since we were still on a falling tide I was against persevering further and we both decided to take the other channel up to Honywood Island (just south west of Horsey Island). There we found a very sheltered spot between Skipper and Honywood islands and decided to anchor for the night. There was still enough light and John and I decided to try out our sounding poles from our dinghies. Soon after this foray *Gwendoline* arrived, having made it over the shallows that we had feared to cross, and came alongside to join us for drinks. John stayed to enjoy our eggs and bacon.

Saturday, 3 September: Wind - SE 2-3 Sunny (mist later) HW 1248, LW 1846: After a quiet and comfortable night we woke to a fine sunny morning, had breakfast and then set off to survey in earnest. We chose to explore Landermere Creek and *Albert* Oakley Creek. *Gwendoline* set off to sail over the Wade Causeway of Horsey Mere. *Emily Ann* sailed from Titchmarsh Marina to explore Horsey Mere from the west.

The tide was high enough by then to sail straight up Landermere Creek without fear of grounding and we took several soundings with the echo sounder on our way up to Landermere Quay and then dropped anchor. We then took to the dinghy together with sounding pole and GPS and paddled in search of the barge canal which led up to Beaumont Quay. *Gwendoline* had been there the day before and had noted the height of the power lines. She had reported that it was possible for a Shrimper to pass under these without lowering the mast when there was just enough water to float. There might not be sufficient head room at high water.

We found the canal tucked up close against the north bank, very well hidden and started to paddle along it taking soundings every 50m. We turned back when it became clear that the canal was well defined and the depth did not vary much. We decided that this would be the subject of another trip in *Bumble*. We still had enough time to explore the passage from Landermere Creek around to the south of Skipper Island.

We set off and followed the creek choosing what we thought to be the main channel. Eventually we ran aground and realised that even at high water it would be risky to try and get round. So having taken a few soundings we retraced our steps and headed for Stone Point to meet up with the rest of the fleet for lunch. By now a sea fret had rolled in from the south east and the temperature had dropped several degrees.

We arrived at Stone Creek to find *Sly Talk* already at anchor and we tied up alongside. Tony Coles had sailed up from the Swale in Kent the day before and had arrived off the Naze at sunset. The sea had been very choppy and it was a dark night, making it difficult to see the entrance marks to the Backwaters, so he had decided to spend the night up the Stour. He had sailed round to Stone Point that morning.

It was not long before we were joined by *Gwendoline*, *Emily Ann*, *Albert* and *Peggy*. The Crabber 24, with Ben and Gilly Fitzgerald aboard, motored up and anchored a little way upstream. The party was complete apart from Andy and Tina Fitzgerald in their borrowed Dragonfly trimaran, and we settled down for drinks and a picnic lunch. The sun kept trying to appear but the sea fret persisted. By now the tide was falling fast, which made further exploring in the Shrimpers hazardous. Several of the party rowed ashore to explore Stone Point as more sand and mud became exposed. *Gwendoline's* crew set off in their tender to explore Dardanelles Creek.

Although it was only a mile and a half to Titchmarsh Marina we decided to make our way there as the cold mist was showing little sign of clearing. We arrived there at near low water and found it difficult to thread our way into the narrow channels between the pontoons. That evening we all met up in the marina's restaurant - by then the numbers had grown to 17. We enjoyed a very pleasant evening.

Sunday, 4 September: Wind - SE 2-3 Sunny LW 0642, HW 1322: We awoke to a fine morning. There was no set plan as most of the boats needed to be back in their home ports by high tide. This only left ourselves and *Sly Talk*, and we arranged to meet up for lunch at the Walton and Frinton Yacht club.

The tide was just right to explore the Wade and soon after 9am we left Titchmarsh and motored towards the Causeway taking soundings as we went.

East Coast Rally in Walton Backwaters

Eventually we ran aground just short of the Causeway and anchored in the narrow channel. We then set off in *Bum Chug* armed with GPS and sounding pole and paddled towards the Causeway. We spent two hours paddling along the channels in the mud taking soundings until we reached deep water the other side and then returned to *Bumble Chugger*.

We had a pleasant sail round to Stone Point and then turned back and made our way up to the Yacht Club. It was still flooding and the channel narrowed sharply as we came round the last two bends. We moored to the quay to the west of the club and it was not long before Tony appeared in his tender. He had motored the two miles from Stone Point. After a pleasant drink and toasted sandwich in the club we said our good-byes and set sail for Felixstowe Ferry. It was a great sail in the sunshine and we made the 11 miles in two hours. It had turned out to be a memorable weekend.

Epilogue

I have had a lot of fun interpreting the results of the survey prepared by the records from the four participating boats (*Emily Ann*, *Albert*, *Gwendoline* and *Bumble Chugger*) and can happily say that they make sense. Each record had to be given with the time, position (latitude and longitude), sounding and any comment. In all, 81 readings were taken. I have been quite careful in converting them to chart depths. This meant creating a spreadsheet with the tide sequence for each of the three days. The chart depth could be calculated (sounding - tide depth). In fact I was able to check soundings of the same place taken by different boats (*Emily Ann* and *Bumble Chugger*) on different days and the results were the same!! The results are now plotted on to a large-scale chart and I can make this available to anyone interested.

But there is more work to be done to fill in some of the obscure corners (e.g. to Kirby Quay and round the south side of Skipper Island). For another day perhaps!

I take my hat off to the Secret Archipelago Expedition which achieved much more than we did!!

Karabadangbaraka

Robin & Gillie Whittle, *Bumblechugger* (124)

Walton Backwaters

