

“Some Silverware at Last” by Steve Mitchell



Weather forecasts are always monitored eagerly and with trepidation prior to our now annual pre Yarmouth Old Gaffers trip. This usually coincides with my youngest sons half term holiday and this year was no exception. As with all the forecasts this year any stability was notably absent. We had hoped to visit Poole Harbour but due to heavy rain we had already delayed our start by a day, so decided to keep within the confines of the Solent. With

both sons on board I made for one of our favourite haunts, Newtown Creek. We anchored in our usual spot and hunkered down for the night. Fyn is now too tall to kip on the cabin floor so I am now resident in the cockpit complete with thermarest, sleeping bag and bivvy bag under the boom tent.

The next day brought no respite in the rain and an ever increasing wind. Whilst heading for Keyhaven the forecast increased to an imminent force 8. So we tucked, as far as we could go into Mount Lake, Keyhaven and spent that evening listening to the crashing waves on the other side of the shingle bank. After supper we witnessed a platoon of troops yomping up to Hurst Castle laden with all sorts of military paraphernalia.

At first light the next morning their purpose became apparent. We were awoken by an impressive sounding firefright whilst they protected the fort from an assaulting force. Then they yomped all the way back !

With the previous days front now passed we were met with a glorious day, and that is where the glory ended. On leaving the creek (on a falling tide) we passed the line of moored yachts leaving a good 6ft of clearance when we ground (or squelched) to a halt. Here we stayed after numerous muddy attempts to refloat.



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Luckily the sun shone for the next 4 hours whilst we sat at our jaunty angle and waved to the passing Hurst Castle passenger boat every 30 mins. I really felt for Mike as he had been at the helm and was quietly blaming himself. I reassured him we would be in Yarmouth that evening well before the bar closed and it would be a dim distant memory. Once the tide started to flood I rowed out in the canoe to lay out the anchor ready for departure. Once clear of Keyhaven we made the short hop to Yarmouth in one tack just before the heavens opened again.

We were directed by the Harbourmaster to a pontoon rather than the piles opposite the slipway which negated the use of my ‘Yarmouth’ 50m shorelines. That evening whilst we attended the Gaffers BBQ it continued to rain. We hoped the next 3 days would bring better weather. We were not to be disappointed.

After the official opening of the Old Gaffers Festival by Sir Robin Knox Johnston we embarked on our regular visit to the Funfair, Big Boys Toys and the street market. The entertainment in the marquee was up to its usual high standard as were the beer prices !.

Saturday brought more sunshine but little wind. The gaffers provided a lovely sight for the crowds gathered on the pier whilst kedging against the tide before the start of the race. We drifted across the start line boxed in by the bigger gaffers. Once we had drifted passed the windward mark and in fear of having dinner in Alum Bay we decided to drop the anchor and wait for the wind. It took all the anchor chain and warp and two mooring lines to secure a grip on the sea bed. Once the wind gave us way over the tide it took a somewhat herculian effort by yours truly to retrieve the anchor against our forward motion and the tide. The wind increased and we tore across the finishing line achieving first place in our class. Some silverware at last ! We later discovered that we were the only boat in our class to finish as all others had retired – oh well – never mind.

That evening Fyn collected our prize and we celebrated our success.

On Sunday morning we set sail for Bucklers Hard and recovery back to Bulford, happy in the thoughts of another successful but somewhat wet half term sail.



Photo courtesy of Marion Heming of Yarmouth

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Steve Mitchell *Spray* (19)