

Why sail a 19'6" Cornish Shrimper around the mainland of Great Britain? Well, it resulted from a casual reply at a dinner party to the familiar question "what will you do when you retire?" Subsequent research into some of the hazards gave rise to some sleepless nights, but it was too late to withdraw as word had got around. Sue was not entirely happy with the bathroom accommodation on the Shrimper and offered to act as mission control from home. Our two sons Humphrey and Olly would join me when they could.

After some modifications to *Humpol* (88), which included a 12 volt battery, an alternator for the outboard, an autohelm, wind generator and a cruising chute, I set off alone and headed east from Poole on a beautiful afternoon in May 2004. Free from the land at last with warm sunshine, a nice breeze off the shore and the prospect of adventure ahead, I was in high spirits but was soon to be found unprepared. As *Humpol* rounded Hurst into the Solent, the wind freshened out of dark clouds to the NE and with the tide running against it a short steep sea rapidly developed; without oilskins and unreefed, I was soon soaked and by the time the reefing pennants were sorted out and the boat got under control, the rain had started and the light was failing. I eventually reached the shelter of the Beaulieu River tired, wet and rather depressed.



The journey along the south coast was dogged by easterlies. I called in at Chichester and Newhaven after a miserably cold night off Brighton beating against wind and rain trying to keep awake. I also had an alarming time passing Dover Harbour; so many ferries were either entering or leaving, seemingly oblivious of our presence, that navigating

Humpol through the disturbed waters was like pushing a pram across the M4. After several desperate alterations of course we eventually reached the South Foreland and were able to round the first corner and turn north for Ramsgate.

With its numerous sandbanks, the Thames Estuary looks formidable on the chart, but with the aid of the GPS and a large number of waypoints, I had a splendid sail in fine weather negotiating Foulgers Gut, Black Deep, the Swin etc. With a fair tide all the way and a nice sou' westerly, *Humpol* reached the Walton backwaters in 8 hours and anchored in a delightful and deserted creek in the 'Secret Water' of the Swallows and Amazons. Lunch comprised two pork pies sustained with red wine from the box. It was tempting to linger but I had to press on and reached Lowestoft the next evening after a pleasant sail helped by the cruising chute on its first airing.

I had some concerns about the next leg to Blakeney. After Yarmouth there were no safe havens if it should start to blow, and the sea to the east was cluttered with oil rigs; even Blakeney could only be entered 2 hours either side of HW and not if it was blowing from the north. Visibility was poor, and when a weird shape appeared on the starboard bow I thought I was hallucinating until it turned out to be a wind turbine, to be followed by another twenty, built on the Scroby Sands but not marked on my chart. Also I could not discern the entrance to Blakeney amongst the line of breakers along the sandy shore, since the higher ground and church behind the harbour were hidden in the murk. Luckily a gaff rig appeared from nowhere to confirm the directions of the GPS and, having had a following wind all the way, we crossed the bar just before HW. After a pleasant day in Blakeney enforced by a brisk northerly causing the surf to thunder on the sands protecting the harbour, I sailed to the Humber and left *Humpol* for a few weeks in the marina at Grimsby.

On 6th July I returned with Olly, our youngest son free from university for the summer, and set off for Scarborough. The wind was light and eventually died altogether as we motored round the chalky cliffs of Flamborough Head. There were streams of guillemots flying purposefully north. Strong NE winds were forecast but as it was calm we decided to press on under power through the night for Whitby, where we tied up at 0430hrs just below the swing bridge.

We enjoyed the holiday atmosphere of Whitby but the predicted northerly was beginning to assert itself and there was no question of leaving the harbour; the seas were rolling between the pier heads and a display of photographs in the lifeboats museum of ships wrecked while trying to enter Whitby did nothing to reassure us.

We headed north some days later, passing the industrial heartland of the east coast - Hartlepool, Teeside, and then Sunderland and Tyneside - before reaching Blyth. There we dined in the old wooden lightship, the clubhouse of the RNYC, whose members were most hospitable. The next day, with a gentle south-easterly filling the cruising chute, we set a course for Holy Island, which afforded fine views of Dunstanburgh and Bamburgh castles and took us inside the Farne Islands from where Grace Darling made her famous rescue in 1838.

We anchored in the bay between Lindisfarne Castle and the red stone ruins of the old priory where St Cuthbert worshipped; the whole place, cut off by the tide at HW and with its upturned boats used as fisherman's huts, had a medieval atmosphere. The following morning a gentle breeze from the south soon veered and strengthened to force 4 gusting 5 off the land, and we made fine progress north with Berwick-on-Tweed and Scotland in sight on the port bow and a glimpse of the GNER train rushing south along the cliff. The sun shone but the wind freshened further so the autohelm was disengaged and 2 reefs were tied in.

It was quite rough off St Abb's Head and beyond we felt the full strength of the wind blowing down the Firth of Forth as we steered a course to pass inside the Bell Rock putting the wind just forward of the beam. At 1900hrs there was



strong wind warning from the coastguard. With sunshine interspersed with rain squalls, May Island resembling a nuclear submarine to port and gannets flying in line ahead low over the waves, the ride was most exciting, but when the gusts increased to force 7 and the boom started hitting the wave tops and the seas began to leap into the cockpit, exhilaration turned to apprehension: the mains'l was lowered and we hurried on under jib alone. When Olly appeared from below and vomited over the side, the prospect for the night looked rather bleak. However, at dusk the wind seem to moderate a little and, despite the failing light, we were able make out the Bell Rock lighthouse.

Olly, apparently recovered (he blamed the salami sausage and the lack of a fridge), came up for his watch and seemed to relish the stormy conditions.

During the night the seas declined somewhat as we closed the coast near Montrose, and dawn heralded grey skies and rain and a coastline that was reminiscent of Cornwall. Huge numbers of seabirds, mainly guillemots, razorbills and puffins, sat on the waves and scurried away or dived as we sailed by.

A large swell was building as we approached Peterhead and the waves deflected from the harbour walls produced a chaotic sea across the entrance. We were running by the lee and in danger of gybing, but *Humpol* with Olly at the helm never faltered and we suddenly found ourselves in calm waters after 28 hours at sea, having sailed 115 miles.

25th July - we found nothing in Peterhead to encourage us to stay and put to sea imprudently, subsequently finding ourselves beating into a force 6 and steep seas round Rattray Head. Rather than run back to Peterhead we found some shelter, from the sea at least, in a wide sandy bay just south of Fraserburgh. The wind blew very hard, but with all 40 metres of cable paid out the anchor held in the sandy bottom.

The wind dropped in the early hours of the next morning so in the grey dawn, we tacked round an equally grey Fraserburgh and fetched along the shore past Troope Head, white with gannets and their guano, and reached a delightful little marina hidden inside the high walls of the small northern harbour of Whitehills. I bought a cooked lobster and Olly found a bottle of chardonnay and tin of haggis at the local store. Sadly the lobster was mushy and finished up at the bottom of the harbour along with the haggis; the wine was good but not sufficient to sustain us, so we found some delicious smoked fish toasties in the local hotel.

27th July: As the weather seemed settled we decided to shun the Caledonian Canal and risk the strong tides and turbulent waters of the Pentland Firth (not a place for the faint hearted, advised the pilot guide) and set a course for Wick. After an uneventful passage we tied up in this rather depressed and deserted harbour. The next day was calm and sunny, it was neap tides so conditions were ideal for the Pentland Firth where the over-falls on the west-going tide stretch from the

rocks of May on the mainland coast all the way across to Orkney except for two hours when a small gap opens at the southern end. Correct timing was essential, and on local advice we left Wick one hour before HW and motored round Duncansby Head, passing between Stroma and John O'Groats. As we approached the west end of Stroma, we encountered a long swell rolling in from the west. I was worried that we were too early but Olly, standing on the cabin roof, thought he could see a clear passage between the white water off the rocks and the huge over-falls to seaward.

Therefore we decided to put ourselves at the mercy of the racing current, for there could be no turning back. I placed the VHF in the pocket of my oilskin, we closed all the hatches and put on life jackets over our safety harnesses. Guided by the GPS to a waypoint that should put us about 150 metres off the end of the rocks, we pointed *Humpol's* bow at the relatively smooth gap of water which proved to be about 200 metres wide, and passed through without too much trouble. For Olly, however, this was bit of an anti-climax: with the heavy swell thundering on the ledges of St John's Point 100 metres to the south and the large over-falls of the Merry Men of May 100m to seaward, it was not hard to imagine how different conditions might be in stormy weather.

We motored by Dunnet Head, the most northerly point of Scotland, and at 1345 hours tied up alongside a Polish yacht in Scrabster Harbour. An ancient mariner was admiring *Humpol* and enquired whether we had 'come down' from Poole. I replied that I thought that we had 'come up'. He then explained that because the tide floods round Scotland and south through the North Sea to London, old sailors talked about going 'up' to London on the flood and returning 'down' on the ebb. Some months later there was correspondence in *The Times* about ups and downs to London, so I wrote offering the ancient mariner's wise explanation. A few days after publication, I received a letter postmarked Thurso beginning 'Dear Mr Dorrell'. The ancient mariner (aged only 68) also reads *The Times*.....! We had an excellent meal in the Ferry Inn, the best so far, soup and beautifully fresh halibut in white wine sauce and served in the bar as the restaurant was full.

On July 29th, with a breeze from SSE, we set sail for Loch Eriboll 37miles to the west and only 10 miles from Cape Wrath. After passing the white dome of Dounray, bright in the morning sun, the high mountains of Sutherland began to appear above the horizon and by 1430hrs we had entered the magnificent Loch

Eriboll and anchored in Respond Bay. We lunched on risotto and red wine from the box. We would love to have remained for some days, but I was fearful of being stormbound in such a remote part of the land.

On the morning of 30th July we beat into a light westerly largely generated by the strong tide, towards the ruggedly beautiful Cape Wrath with its daunting reputation but in a benign mood for us.

At exactly noon on 30th July when the lighthouse bore 180° magnetic, I felt that we had reached the summit of our mountain and could at last turn south. Once round the wind died away altogether so we put *Humpol* in charge of the outboard and the autohelm and munched our cheese and salami sandwiches viewing the great Scottish mountains to the east over the calm waters of the North Minch, which were empty apart from myriads of guillemots, razorbills and puffins sitting in groups on the glassy surface. We anchored in Loch Nedd at 1910 hours and unshaven, unshowered, in clothes stiffened by salt and in high spirits having rounded the third corner of the land went ashore to find some dinner. The Madame at the local hotel, with little hesitation, informed us the restaurant was full so we sought comfort in the bar where snacks consisted only of a bowl of olives but, with our second pint, a small cheese soufflé arrived from the kitchen. Then our hostess showed compassion and we were ushered into the dining room and sat amongst her shiny, spotless, sweet smelling guests and enjoyed a most excellent meal oblivious of our own condition.

The next day was fine and Olly went ashore to climb a Scottish mountain while I cleaned the boat, bought some provisions from the local store and swam in the icy waters of the loch. Towards evening I became restless and as soon as Ol returned, exuberant after his day in the hills, we weighed anchor at 2030 hours and despite the lack of wind set off, rounding Point Stoer at 2203 hours and then set a course of 220° mag. for the Isle of Skye. After a calm night, the dawn revealed a spectacular landscape to the east with the sun rising above the mountains coloured pink in the early light with Rona, Raasay and Skye ahead and the Outer Hebrides just visible to westward across the flat sea. A whale surfaced close by and dived beneath us its foul breath pungent in the fresh morning air. At 1215hrs we anchored in the harbour of Portree, having motored all of the 63 miles.

Monday 2nd August 0514hrs - slipped our mooring in Portree and sailed south through the Sound of Raasay. The wind was light and variable, influenced more by the local geography than the general weather pattern, so at times we motored and others we sailed. The scenery of Skye and the adjacent islands was stunning, changing colour as the sun rose and our angle of view altered. We passed between Longay and Scalpay and then under the bridge joining Skye to the mainland and had a brisk but invigorating turn to windward with a strong favourable tide through the Kyle of Lochalsh. However as we turned south through the narrow gorge of the Kyle of Rhea, the wind left us to the mercy of the whirlpools and racing torrent, the GPS registering 11 knots. Fed up with motoring we put into a delightful anchorage behind the island of Ornsay on the west side of the Sound of Sleat.

The next day was overcast with intermittent rain, poor visibility and a light SE wind. We had a close fetch past Mallaig inside Eigg and Muck, dark shapes in the mist, to Ardnurmurchan Point. There the wind died completely, so we continued under power into the sound of Mull and Tobermory Harbour. We found petrol, food and purchased a bottle of malt whisky. This colourful port was so crowded with both tourists and yachts that we had no inclination to stay but motored south to Loch Aline, which looked much more attractive despite the mist.

4th August: We had now been under way for 2 weeks having never spent more than one night in any harbour. Once again there was no wind but the fog cleared so we pressed on south although a little late for the tide through the Sound of Luìng. I was worried that if the engine failed opposite the gulf of Coreyvrecken with its fearsome reputation, we would be carried helpless by the flood tide into its raging whirlpools, steep over-falls and standing waves, so we headed to the east side of the sound and anchored in a small bay for 6 hours to await the beginning of the ebb. At 1730 hours, towards slack water, we headed south once more through the Sound of Jura leaving Islay to starboard, and into the dusk with rain storms building ahead but still no wind. Running short of supplies, we chanced another tin of haggis but it was also destined for the bottom of the sound. A grey dawn found us a mile to the west of the Mull of Kintyre motoring flat out against the tide but only making 1 knot of headway and running alarmingly short of fuel. A forecast of strong winds from the south in the next few days added to our low morale.

Olly suggested we head in towards the cliffs where we found a strong eddy running south, which also generated some wind, so we were able to tack close inshore and make better progress without the engine. There were long lines of gannets flying east low over the water and stark white against the dark headland. Eventually the wind filled in from the SE, the tide turned in our favour and we had a grand sail on a close reach to Loch Belfast, arriving in Bangor marina at 1645 hours, 127 miles from Loch Aline.

Olly flew home, but I was not allowed to fly as I had no photographic ID. Faced with the option of a night ferry to Liverpool I refilled the petrol cans and set off at 1145hrs for Holyhead 97 miles across the Irish Sea. There was very little wind and mainly from the SE so the engine was running most of the way. I had intended to stop for a few hours in Port Erin on the Isle of Man, but the forecast warned of a tropical storm moving rapidly east, a remnant of hurricane Alex, so I thought it prudent to carry on for Anglesey. Apart from a wonderful display of acrobatics around the boat by several dolphins and a close encounter with a large vessel in the night the passage was unremarkable. I tied up in the marina at 1010hrs and caught a Virgin train back to Bournemouth.

21st August: Humphrey, our eldest son, joined the ship at Holyhead but the first day was spent unhappily in the driving rain watching the gale-swept seas breaking over the harbour wall. The next day we tacked into a NW 4 through a confused sea until we could weather South Stack and turn south hopefully for Fishguard. With sunshine and good visibility we had a great sail across Caernarfon Bay with Snowdon in the background and listening to the commentary of the coxless four winning gold at Athens. As Bardsey Island drew near the wind dropped and backed to SSW, so we headed east into Cardigan Bay and entered the little creek that widens into the huge marina of Pwllheli. As the weather looked unpromising and the end of August was near, I decided to abandon the trip for 2004, put *Humpol* ashore and return in May 2005.

On May 27th 2005 at 0505hrs I set off alone from Pwllheli into Cardigan Bay surrounded by the great crescent of Welsh mountains with Snowden to the north and Cader Idris to the south. There was no wind but we pressed on under power as a depression was approaching and expected the next day. At 0825hrs the bell buoy guarding St Patrick's causeway was abeam but not tolling. The wind did not arrive till the afternoon and then from the SW, which allowed a close fetch into Fishguard where I anchored in the lower harbour at 1830 hrs.

I was glad to be in a safe haven since, when I returned from a pint in the 'Ship', heavy gusts were funnelling down the gully that forms the old harbour and the next morning it was blowing a good force 8 from the south. By Sunday the wind had dropped, so I left Fishguard at dawn in time to carry the last of the ebb through Ramsey Sound using the GPS to align me on longitude W05°19.4, which safely negotiated the rocky hazards, the 'Horse' to port and the 'Bitches' to starboard. It was a gentle sail on a fine morning across St Brides Bay to Skomer where I anchored in North Harbour to await slack water through Jack Sound and observe the puffins. The wind was SW 3 in the sound so *Humpol* sailed through on starboard tack carefully keeping on W5°15.5 to avoid the submerged rocks on either side over which the seas were breaking. The wind freshened as we eased sheets, affording a splendid sail into Milford Haven.

Monday 30th May: There was a flat calm when *Humpol* left Wales at 4 a.m. bound for the river Camel in Cornwall - a distance of 70 miles. The wind did not come until midday when Lundy was well abaft the beam; it was WSW 3 and permitted a welcome relief from the drone of the outboard. I picked up a mooring off Rock at 2025hrs, 16 hours from Angle and relieved to be in Cornwall.

The next morning *Humpol* sailed out of the estuary in the company of *Salthorse II* (Sarah & Martin Pumphrey). The wind failed as we reached the sea so *Salthorse* turned for home while *Humpol* motored round Trevoze Head between the Bull and the Quies and into Newquay Bay where the wind returned, backing to just east of south. Low clouds were forming over Cape Cornwall as we sailed on to St Ives on a gloomy wet evening and anchored just south of the entrance to the harbour, which had dried out.

I had long looked forward to the next leg and the rounding of the longest, fourth and final corner of the land, as impressive as Cape Wrath though not perhaps so remote; sadly I was to be gravely disappointed. I left St Ives at 0430hrs in a grey and misty dawn with low cloud over the hills. Soon the coastline disappeared as we tacked into a light breeze from WSW. I was anxious about carrying the tide round Lands End and motor-sailed on port tack but with the outboard this was impossible on starboard. Apart from a brief glimpse of the Brisons, I did not see the coast until Black Head emerged from the murk later that afternoon. Once level with the Longships 6 cables to leeward but invisible, sheets were eased and with a strengthening sou'westerly we made good progress east despite the foul

tide. A fishing boat appeared out of the fog close by but thankfully nothing larger, and I did not see the Lizard although its foghorn was reassuringly loud.

1520hrs - With good visibility at last we raced past the Manacles buoy and with gannets circling overhead it was a famous sail into Falmouth Bay at over 5k in the freshening wind, with the familiar landmarks showing ahead, and finally passing the golden sands of Lighthouse Beach before rounding Carrickneth to drop anchor under the lee of Amsterdam Point. I rowed ashore for a first-rate bangers and mash and a pint in the warmth and comfort of the Victory; 58miles, 12hrs40 min from St Ives.

Olly and I returned to St Mawes a few weeks later for the final leg of the circumnavigation. On a day of intermittent rain storms, which at times obscured the Cornish coast, but accompanied by a good favourable wind, we set off for Plymouth to pick up Humphrey. The next day we sailed for Dartmouth in similar weather with low cloud lying over Bolt Head and Prawle Point, but not enough to hide this spectacular coast with its wooded estuaries as beautiful as any that I had seen round Great Britain. With the aid of the cruising chute, we reached the river Dart in time for tea.

On 2nd July at 0425hrs *Humpol* motored out of the river Dart, the skipper in effect single-handed as the crew had spent the night on the town. I could just make out the spiky outline of the Mewstone in the drizzle. At 0500 the breeze from WSW set in and gradually increased throughout the day and with the chute set we had a lovely sail across Lyme Bay steering 80° mag. to place us 3 miles south of Portland. At 1440hrs the Bill was bearing due north and just visible, the wind now force 5 and too much for the spinnaker. At 1600hrs the tide turned in our favour and with the GPS registering 6.5 knots *Humpol* bashed through St Albans race, the headland looking magnificent in the afternoon sunshine. We rushed past Durlston Head and Old Harry and, despite some heavy gusts across Studland Bay, hoisted the spinnaker for the final run into Poole Harbour. Fortunately the mast survived and Sue was there to photograph the finish from the Haven. At 1910hrs we reached the RMYC – 77 miles from Dartmouth in 15 hours, averaging 5.1 knots. Thus *Humpol* had completed her circumnavigation, a distance of 1663 miles and spending 38 days at sea.

David Dorrell *Humpol* (88)