

2010 Almost on the rocks – Poole to Chichester Harbour Fun Week

Mike Shearman (*Triplet 815*)

Saturday 17th July

Having spent most of my life daysailing in open boats I do not have much experience of passage planning, but I have discovered that very often one plan is not enough. On this occasion I needed to get myself from Poole to the north end of Hayling Island by the evening of Sunday the 18th of July. This was where the Solent and Chichester branch of the SOA were kicking off Chichester Harbour Fun Week with a bring-your-own barbecue.

Plan A was to sail from Poole to the Solent on Saturday, anchor at Keyhaven or Newtown, then on to Chichester Harbour the next day. However, when I looked at the weather on Saturday it seemed to be fairly windy, and a quick look at a couple of online weather stations showed force 5-6 from the south-west. I know from experience that Poole Bay can be quite lumpy in these conditions, and although this passage was possible in theory, it was not really advisable, particularly as I was going single-handed. Plan B was needed. The forecast for Sunday was less windy so I decided to spend Saturday night in a sheltered spot in Poole Harbour – preferably in Blood Alley Lake on the south side of Brownsea Island - and make an early morning passage to Hurst Narrows. This would get me there for the start of the flood into the Solent, which was at around 09.45, followed by about six hours of fair tide through to Chichester.

I took the last Parkstone Club ferry to my mooring and packed my kit into the cabin. Having started the engine I sat in the cockpit to consider my next move. My mooring is in shallow water about 80 yards south-west of the Parkstone Y C Marina. The breakwater is made of huge jagged lumps of rock piled up on the harbour bed. Another Shrimper – *Endeavour 532* - was moored between me and the rocks. It was still blowing hard from the south- west and Triplet was bouncing in a lively fashion on some short waves which were coming across from the far side of the harbour. If I stayed there I was in for an uncomfortable night, so the Brownsea Island idea seemed quite attractive. I looked downwind at the waves breaking on the rocks as I stirred up the engine in neutral. It seemed to be fine so I decided to go for it, crawled up to the Samson post and chucked the mooring warp and buoy over the side. The moment the buoy hit the water the engine stopped.

There was just time for a couple of brief but heartfelt exclamations as I hurled myself into the cockpit to press the starter button. Absolutely no joy there, so it was back onto the pitching foredeck to throw out the standard 14lb CQR and all of the chain. I watched anxiously as Triplet reversed slowly but inexorably past *Endeavour*. I let out more warp but there was little tension in the line and I could feel the CQR bouncing happily across the bottom. There was another leap into the cockpit and then to the forward locker where I keep my spare anchor - a 6 kg Delta. I managed to free the anchor and chain from the pile of tins and other provisions, then it was back onto the foredeck to lower the Delta into the waves. After a few moments the boat slowed down and came to rest about twenty yards from the rocks.

As I sat wondering what to do next a motorboat came by with about six people on board. When the skipper enquired if I needed any help I asked if they could get me some assistance from the Yacht Club, but instead he offered me a tow back to my mooring. So I tied a strong warp round the mast tabernacle and threw the other end across. Luckily the motorboat had two powerful outboards and I was able to pull in the two anchors as they slowly towed me upwind. After some fumbling to find the boathook I was able to pick up the buoy and slip the noose over the Samson post. Phew! My rescuers gave a cheery wave and disappeared into the dusk.

I cleared up the mess on the foredeck and decided to stay on the mooring (Plan B rev.1).

Sunday 18th July

It was much calmer in the morning with the wind still from the south-west, so I turned my attention to the engine. I thought it could be either water or air in the fuel line. In case it was water, which could have been stirred up by the general pitching about, I turned the engine over a few times with the compression release open. Still no start, so I bled fuel out of both of the top fuel line vents in turn. This did the trick, and soon I was on my way out of the harbour and into the open sea.



Northney Marina – photo by Steve Mitchell

A good passage across Poole Bay saw me at Hurst at about 10.00, then on to Osborne Bay, where I anchored for lunch. Never having been that way before, I was a little surprised at the distance between Osborne Bay and the Chichester Harbour entrance, and nearly got snarled up on the Langstone East Winner when I went to have a closer look at the shore. In the end I located the markers for Chichester Bar and sailed up Emsworth Channel to Northney Marina where I found Robin Wearn (*La Mouette* 379) with his crew John Gaffney and Rodney Arnold (*Morning Vicar* 294). Gradually the other participants turned up and we collected at the Marina barbecue area for a feast of bangers, burgers and other delights.

Monday 19th July

The next day was fine with a southerly wind. We were going down to East Head for lunch. Rodney said that he could show me some seals, so I followed him down the channel. It took a while to get the hang of tacking without getting the plate stuck on the shelving mud, but I soon found that it was a question of starting the turn at a particular depth on the sounder.

After a while Rodney veered off to the east up a shallow and winding channel. There we found a splendid collection of Grey Seals reclining gracefully on the mud. They managed to look slightly superior and wary at the same time, so we proceeded cautiously, with our engines just ticking over. We found our way out without getting stuck and sailed on to East Head. With a rising tide and wind off the beach the Shrimpers were all lined up with their bows just off the sand and anchors carried a few yards up on the shore. This saved us a lot of bother with tenders. It was very hot and I soon discovered that I had forgotten my sunhat. We had a picnic lunch and did the usual things that you do on the beach in the summer – eating, drinking, chatting, lying in the sun, and games or walking for the more energetic. While we were all together Rodney gave us our instructions for the following day. Cruisers are not allowed to race in Chichester Harbour, so we were having a guided procession round a few buoys. We were given Course A, Course B and some starting instructions. As evening approached we motored off to deeper water and rafted up for a few sundowners before anchoring separately for the night.



East Head - photo by Steve Mitchell

Tuesday 20th July

In the morning the wind was still southerly and light as we all drifted slowly towards the start. Not having much knowledge of starting procedures or the buoys of Chichester Harbour I was happy to be in the middle of a gaggle of boats heading towards the line. There was quite a lot of discussion as we went along and information was passed from boat to boat. First of all it was going to be Course A, then Course B. Then there was some confusion about the starting signals, so I just followed the rest. As we neared the line the general consensus seemed to be that we had already started, so we rounded the buoy and headed off for the first mark. A few minutes later a whistle sounded. Someone said 'that was the start, we'll all have to go back'. Nobody did however, and we all floated happily along, looking for the next buoy. I think that not having a crew must have made *Triplet* a bit lighter than the other boats and she sort of drifted through the pack until I found myself behind Robin and John who had ended up at the front of the procession in *La Mouette*. They seemed to know which way to go, so I followed them round the buoys to the west side of the harbour, then up Emsworth Channel to the finish. I nearly got ahead a couple of times but they were firmly in front when we crossed the line. Most of us were disqualified because of the start, but it was good fun anyway.

Having arrived at the top of the Channel we had to wait for some while, until there was enough water to get to our pontoon berths at Emsworth Sailing Club. One or two people went temporarily aground on the way, but in the end we all assembled in a fairly orderly fashion and headed for the showers. On my way to the off-licence I was interested to see that Emsworth has a model boating lake with a group of enthusiasts racing radio-controlled yachts. The Sailing Club provided a very splendid supper and so far as I know, we all had a peaceful night.



Emsworth Sailing Club – photo by Steve Mitchell

Wednesday 21 July

After breakfast we all headed down the channel, out of the Harbour, and across the East Solent to Bembridge, where we anchored in groups for lunch. Then it was back to Chichester Harbour where we were to spend the night as guests of the Thorney Island Sailing Club. This part of the proceedings was organised by Paul and Sarah Brown who did a splendid job showing us to our moorings and ferrying us ashore in a couple of inflatables. On the way to the Club Paul showed us round the 12th century church and churchyard. Until recently the whole of Thorney Island was occupied by the RAF and was strictly out of bounds to civilians. This has helped to preserve the environment and prevent intrusive development. In the churchyard there are several wartime graves for young airmen who lost their lives in the surrounding area. Most of them are British, but there are also some for Luftwaffe aircrew. Apparently this is very unusual, as it is the policy of the German authorities to repatriate all deceased military personnel. The church is very beautiful and well worth a visit.

A delicious supper was provided by the Club and once again we had a very enjoyable evening in the true SOA tradition. Paul and Sarah were on hand again to ferry us back to our boats.

Thursday 22 July

Sadly I had to get back to Poole for a rescue boat duty on Saturday and had to miss the last two days of the event. This time I would not be able to use the tide to get me back in one day and an early morning start was required just to get me up to Newtown. I said goodbye to Rodney, with whom I had been sharing a mooring, and pattered out down the channel. In the distance I could see some of our gang sitting outside the Sailing Club. They gave me a wave as I slowly disappeared. The first part of my sail was not good. It was choppy, raining, and visibility was poor. In these conditions I tend to shut everything out and grumble to myself. This is not a good idea. At one point I realised rather belatedly that I had been heading for the wrong fort, and a quick change of course was needed to avoid some underwater sea defences. Eventually I made it to Cowes, the weather improved and I had a good sail up to Newtown, where I found a very peaceful anchorage just downstream from the sign marking the oyster beds in the Western Haven. This is a very good place for watching waders, and I had a good view of some curlews and redshanks feeding on the shore just a few yards away.

The next day I had another early morning start and a fairly uneventful sail back to Poole.

Lessons learned:

- 1) If the wind is strong, I will avoid setting off from a lee shore, if at all possible. I won't be tempted so easily next time.
- 2) The CQR has been awarded an early retirement in my loft at home. The more modern anchors may seem expensive but this should be viewed in comparison with the cost of a new boat. I now have the Delta on the foredeck and a Fortress in the cabin. Both are oversized – for boats in the 20-30ft range.



Olaf and Lizzi aboard *Little Auk 123* – photo by Robin Wearn

A Vote of Thanks

Each day of the Fun Week was organised by a volunteer from the Chichester Harbour Shrimper community and the whole event was co-ordinated by Lizzi Petersen. I would like to give them all a huge thank you for a very enjoyable week.