

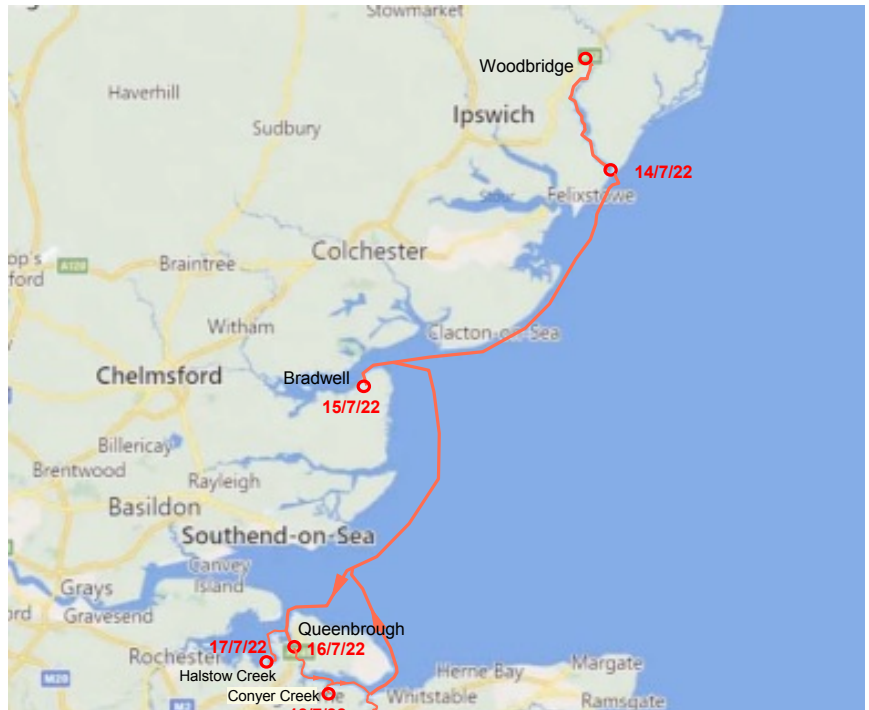
From Woodbridge to Faversham – Robin & Gillie Whittle

The proposed plan for the Medway rally, Thursday 14th to Friday 22nd July 2022 was to sail to or launch on the River Crouch for a night at Burnham Marina, then on to Queenborough via Havengore Bridge. After a visit to Chatham Dockyard, the plan was to explore the River Medway up to Tonbridge.

We had already enjoyed a rally in May 2009 with the same route, and we decided to explore the creeks around the Swale instead. In order to balance the journey from the Deben to Queenborough, a first night at Bradwell Marina was planned.

On Thursday afternoon we sailed down from our mooring at Melton Boatyard to Felixstowe Ferry. We noticed Robert Simper's grandson Harry's fishing trawler, *Boy Michael*, at the Rocks. He had recently motored round from Brixham. Our first night was spent on a swinging mooring at the Ferry. David Andrew and Pat Spencer (*Lady B* - 1073) were moored close by and came over for a drink. Their inflatable was driven by an electric motor! They took us ashore for a meal at the Ferry Boat Inn, where we met up with the rally organiser, Bob and Wendy Whitehouse (*Boudicca* - 423).

Friday, 15th July: Hot. Wind NNE – SSE 2/3. We left the Ferry with *Lady B* at 7.15am, low water; *Boudicca* had already left at 5.30am. David and Pat had decided to explore the Blackwater and the River Crouch and not come to the Medway. Motoring over the Deben Bar at that time was nearly a disaster. Both boats bounced several times off the shingle, luckily not coming to a halt.



Route to the Swale



David and Pat aboard Lady B

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The rest of the sail to Bradwell was uneventful in a hot, fickle wind. We arrived at 1.15pm, strolled to the Green Man and then back to the marina for a meal.

Saturday, 16th July: Hot. Wind NNW- S 2/3. We set off at 6.15am, 2 hrs before LW, to give us the maximum time sailing with the current. The sandbanks dry out at low water so it was essential that we found the correct buoys to ensure clear water. Unfortunately, several of the buoys had been moved, removed or added since our charts were last used. The Almanac was two years out of date, so we found ourselves hunting for one or two of the more important marks. We were fortunate that the weather was sunny with light winds and found our way without going aground. Buxey Sand appeared to stretch further north than we were expecting. We sailed down the East Swin, then the West Swin into the Warp across to the Medway and so to Queenborough, arriving at 1.15pm. We moored on a drying out berth, knowing that we would not be afloat until 2pm next day.

After going ashore for shopping, we returned to find the four other Shrimpers had arrived and had picked up drying out moorings too. Bob in *Boudicca*, John & Judith (*Skylark* - 410), Paul & Debbie (*Thrift* - 96), and John & Paula (*Sapphire* - 21/88). We had a pleasant drink at the Yacht Club with a Chinese take-away.

Sunday, 17th July: Hot (38°C) Wind SE-SW 1/3. Bob set off early (5am) with the Wilsons to Chatham Docks. The other two Shrimpers set off towards the Upper Medway just before us at 2pm. We headed for Halstow Creek and were able to sail up to the top of the Creek. A beautiful Thames Barge, *Edith May*, was just about to set sail on a two-hour charter.



We moored up at the 'scrubbing posts' of the boatyard and walked to the nearby pub, The Three Tuns. Only time for one drink before the tide started to fall. The deputy manager of the boatyard allowed us to use his mooring. The whole area dried out and we were fortunate to stay upright through the night.

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Monday, 18th July: Very Hot (42°C - all-time record in the UK) Wind S 2/3. We planned to sail to Conyer Creek where friends lived and we set off at 5.15am (high water) to Queenborough for temporary stay until the Kings Ferry Bridge was due to open. After shopping and sitting in a sheltered spot under trees in a little park, we set off at 11.15am to the bridge (due to open at 11.45am).



Another Shrimper dried out at Halstow Creek

Our VHF calls were only answered as we neared the bridge (three miles from Queenborough). We were informed that the bridge would not open as the temperature was too high. This meant returning to Queenborough to take the mast down. Fortunately, we found a floating pontoon half way back and moored to that to sort out the mast (release the forestay and disconnect the boom).



Kings Ferry Bridges

We motored back to the bridge where four or five jet skis and fast motor boats were churning up the water making it very uncomfortable. We let the mast down and passed under the low bridge successfully (there are two bridges – rail and road). There was another pontoon just below the bridge to which we moored whilst raising the mast again. A man kindly came aboard to help (he had weak legs and a bad

back but did sterling work!) and after getting the jib halyard unjammed under the cabin roof we managed to get the mast raised.

We had a pleasant sail down the Swale to the entrance to Conyer Creek and motored up to the pre-booked pontoon mooring at the edge of the river. Gillie had a nasty fall as she stepped on to the pontoon (wearing reading spectacles caused her focus to be wrong). Before mooring up I turned the boat round to face downstream. This was a big mistake as we dried out without settling into the existing mud groove that was shaped for pointing upstream. I raised the sail to

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give some shade – very hot). Later went to the local pub, The Ship, for a drink. By chance our friends, Bryn and Sue, turned up there just as we were about to leave, so we celebrated our meeting with another drink! We confirmed that we planned to leave the next day at 3.30pm and that they would join us for the sail round to Faversham (Faversham Creek) where they had booked a meal at the Posillipo Italian restaurant.



Mooring up in Conyer Creek

On returning to the boat we found that the stern had settled too high and we were tipped over badly. Worse, water which had collected in the bilges poured out over the floor boards on the port side. Gillie had a very poor night until the water rose again at 2am.

Tuesday, 19th July: Still very hot!

The first thing to do was to turn the boat round before it re-grounded. The next high water was at 5.30pm so the earliest that we could leave was two hours before.

We spent the morning trying to keep cool then went for a short walk and found our friends' house. They welcomed us indoors for couple of hours and we admired the field that they had just acquired at the back of the garden. On leaving, we revisited the pub for a lunchtime drink. There was still two hours before the time to leave and it was too hot to sit in the boat, so we found a cool spot in the toilet block with two chairs to sit on – relative bliss!



Family of swans in Conyer Creek

Bryn and Sue arrived at 3.15pm so we were able to get off to an early start with just enough depth in the creek. As soon as we had reached the Swale we hoisted the sail and had a pleasant sail eastward to the entrance to Faversham Creek. It

was a hot breeze on the nose, but we had plenty of time to get to Faversham before the tide started to ebb. The creek contained channels up to Oare and Faversham. Faversham Creek was the longer (about 2½M).

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We arrived at high water. An amazing number of Thames Barges (sailing trim) were moored to the banks (right). We found a pontoon close to the Italian restaurant. Gillie and Sue did some shopping and we had a drink before setting off for the meal. At the restaurant we sat under a large patio umbrella, and during the evening a huge gust



blew through causing one group to move sharply indoors. The meal was excellent, served by local girls in Italian outfits. When we got back to the boat it was high and dry, and we found the stern flag had been stolen – pretty poor behaviour by one of the locals!

Wednesday, 20th July: We decided to shorten our journey home by leaving Sheppey Island from the east through Whitstable Bay, instead of returning to Queenborough. We set off in a sunny breeze from the south east (F3/5) at 6am (HW). Once in the Thames estuary we picked up the same waypoints as coming. We arrived at Bradwell at 2pm, sailing 40M and averaging 5Knots. Soon after we arrived, the secretary of the Old Gaffers Association appeared on the pontoon asking if we would be joining the racing at Stone. Gillie introduced herself, as he had been in contact with her about our book, *The Voyages of Bumble Chugger*. He came aboard for a chat and explained how we could sell the book through Amazon.

Thursday, 21st July: The last leg of the return journey to Woodbridge. Again, we set off at high water, 6.30am. It was sunny but not too hot with a NNW wind F2/3. As we crossed the channel leading to Brightlingsea two yachts came up from behind and we were hailed by a friend, John Penn, from Waldringfield Sailing Club. They continued further out to sea but also heading north east.

On reaching Walton-on-the-Naze the wind had dropped and we motor-sailed to the entrance of the Deben. We arrived at LW, but being neaps there was plenty of water over the bar. We had a pleasant sail up river and picked up a mooring at Waldringfield to have a late picnic lunch. By the time we had got underway again there was sufficient water at Melton to be able to reach our pontoon. We arrived at 4pm. It had been our hottest ever sailing trip in *Bumble Chugger*.