

Norfolk Broads 2009 – Robin Whittle

Thursday 6th August: We arrived with *Bumble Chugger* (124) mid-morning at the Swallowtail Boatyard in Ludham, where we met up with Peter and Richard in *Pewitt* (125) and Tony and Cathy in *Shy Talk* (930). The latter had not brought their sailing rig and instead Tony had set up a stub mast with navigation lights at the top (very smart). The



boatyard was a surprisingly unspoilt place, producing beautiful classical timber yachts. The slipway made launching quite easy and we were soon sailing up the River Thurne to Potter Heigham in hot sunshine. At first glance we were doubtful about fitting under the old bridge. As we got closer, I realized that a



strong current was taking us towards it. I lost my nerve and rounded up to head the current. Motoring slowly against the current we passed under the bridge backwards with at least 6 inches head room. Having seen us pass through, *Shy Talk* came straight through without any hesitation. We moored up against the bank to raise our mast and enjoyed a picnic lunch.

Pewitt arrived as we were about to leave. All agreed to meet up at Horsey Mere for the night and set off separately to explore the waters.

We headed off up the Thurne and soon turned off down Candle Dyke which led us to Hickling Broad. It was a glorious sail from there with a freeing wind and only three or four other sailing boats in view. The Broad opened up into a wide stretch of water with a number of islands and creeks leading off it. We sailed the full length up to the moorings and staithe and then turned round and sailed back to the entrance to Meadow Dyke, which led us up to Horsey Mere and then up the dyke towards the large mill which stood at the far end. *Shy Talk* had already arrived and we moored up next to them.

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We decided to visit the local pub, The Nelson's Head, a mile up the road. It turned out to be very traditional with no piped music, just the quiet hum of people chatting. The walls were decorated with an amazing array of old guns including an original Norfolk Punt gun. It was at least 8ft long and we were told that one shot from it could kill up to 100 birds. The gunman lay along the bottom of the boat, and the recoil shot him and the small craft 50ft back in the water - it wasn't uncommon for him to break his collar bone. After a pleasant meal we walked back to the boats in the dark; in the night there was a heavy rainfall.



Friday: The skies had cleared by the time we set off. *Shy Talk* motored off to explore the dyke to Waxham and we set off under sail to explore the River Thurne up to West Somerton. The wind was in our favour for most of the way with a north/west light breeze. We moored to the bank and decided to explore the village and visit the church. The octagonal tower had been recently restored and the church was just being rethatched! In the graveyard we found the tomb of Robert Hales who, being 7ft 8in tall, was known as the Norfolk Giant. He died in his mid-50s in 1863. Our destination for the night was down the River Bure to Upton Dyke. Lowering our mast at Potter Heigham turned out to be quite easy and we were soon through the bridge. With a pleasant breeze we sailed down to Acle Bridge before returning in time to get to Upton in the early evening. *Shy Talk* had arrived a little earlier and *Peewit* arrived as we were mooring up to the bank. It was a sunny evening and we all set off to find the White Horse for beer and fish and chips. Geoff and Carole Eason, who lived at Horning, joined us there by road. After a pleasant meal we returned to the boats.

Saturday: We woke to another sunny still morning and motored down the dyke to rejoin the River Bure. At the remains of St Benet of Hulme, where a windmill had been built on the existing foundations, we made a small diversion to South Walsham Broad before we headed for the River Ant.

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As we entered the river we noticed an otter by the bank wrestling with a fish; it barely took any notice of us and carried on with its meal. After passing through Ludham Bridge, we motor-sailed up the winding Ant to Barton Broad. One of the two remaining working Wherries, *Albion*, was sailing across the broad and looked a magnificent sight with its black mainsail twisting off with the wind. After a brief nostalgic visit to Barton Turf, reminding me of my schooldays, we sailed up Sutton Broad and then back down Stalham Dyke to look for the Moonfleet marine boatyard, tucked away up a small secondary dyke, where we all moored for the night.

Sunday: We spent much of the morning at the Museum of the Broads just the other side of our cut and had a guided tour around one of the Wherries. Although sailed only by a man and boy, the boy must have had a Tarzan physique as all the gear was extremely heavy to operate. We then set off to meet up with *Shy Talk* at Wayford Bridge and make our way up the Ant to Dilham. It was a beautiful stretch of river with very few other boats around. At Dilham we walked to the local pub, The Cross Keys. The afternoon was spent sailing round Barton Broad watching the racing going on. Three modern Norfolk Punts equipped with trapezes were showing their heels. Then, after sailing up to Neatishead, we returned to the wider part of the dyke close to Barton Broad and dropped anchor for the night close to the reeds there. Both the other Shrimpers joined us and we rafted up to have drinks together while watching the birdlife which was very active that evening. A kingfisher was fishing from a bush quite close. Chris and Caroline How in *Windfall (21)*, who had spent a pleasant evening sailing on the Broad, joined us for a drink before returning to their mooring in Neatishead.

Monday: The barometer had dropped a little but the weather still held fine and I had a pleasant swim before breakfast, joined by Peter. We spent the morning sailing around Barton Broad. Although the plan was to sail to Horning for the evening we decided to divert to Ranworth Broad. Peter and Rosemary chose to explore South Walsham Broad. We were joined by Tony and Cathy and decided

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to visit the church, which stands on a slight hill overlooking most of the northern Broads. It was quite a climb up the tower in a very narrow spiral staircase – 89 steps with two step ladders at the top – but the view was stunning!

We rejoined the boats and made our way leisurely back up the River Bure to the Southgate Yacht Station in Horning. Geoff and Carol had invited us to their house that evening where they had laid on a superb meal. Brian and Janet Teather were also invited. They kept their boat *Jolly Janet* (115) on Hickling Broad. We returned back to the boats having enjoyed a great evening.



Tuesday 11 August: We set off to explore the upper reaches of the River Bure and on the way diverted into the very quiet and beautiful Black Horse Broad and had a pleasant sail around Wroxham Broad. Through Wroxham Bridge we continued motoring up the rapidly narrowing river, through Belaugh and on to Coltishall. We saw many kingfishers, herons, grebes and families of ducks. At Coltishall we joined



Peter and Rosemary who had already moored up at the Rising Sun on the riverside, and enjoyed a drink with them in the warm sunshine. We had originally intended to stay that night at a boatyard in Wroxham but decided to stop off in Bridge Broad just upstream of the railway bridge in Wroxham. Peter and Rosemary joined us and we anchored among 30 swans that had adopted it as their home.

Wednesday: We awoke to rain and checked the detailed forecast for the day. It showed no sign of abating, with heavy showers expected later. We all decided that having had such glorious weather for six days, we would cut our losses and go home a day early. It was a long wet chug back to Swallowtail Boatyard, followed by packing up the boats and a final farewell to the others. It had been a fantastic visit to the Broads and many thanks to Geoff Eason for all the detailed planning!

Robin Whittle – *Bumble Chugger* (124)