

The Voyage starts.... Day One - Chichester to Ashlett Creek

Having checked round the boat one last time that everything was in its place and ready to go there was no more putting it off. With a slightly dry mouth I called the Lock control on the VHF and requested a lock out. "Come straight down" they replied. I told them that I was single handed - and almost as an afterthought added "...and it's my first time".

I needn't have worried, the lock went like clockwork, the man holding my lines high above me commented that the boat must be new as he could smell the glass fibre resin and asked when I would be back. He did his best not to look too shocked when I lightly mentioned something about the 1st of July. Then I was out and motoring down through Itchenor Reach to my rendezvous with Peter Tiplady in "Siesta", his Drascombe Drifter and Richard Goldsmith in his Drascombe Coaster "Egret" at East Head.

After a brief diversion to the back of Hayling Island to wait for the tide we were off, sailing along the coast, past Portsmouth and into Southampton Water, across to Ashlett Creek to r/v with Nick Payne (Coaster "Virginia") and Simon Farley (Drifter "Sundance").

The passage plan dictated an early start so bed by 21.00, for my first night afloat on the new boat.



Photographs – Crossing the bar out of Chichester, Tied up in Ashlett.

Day Two - Ashlett to Poole



The day dawned fine and bright in Ashlett, with no wind to speak of. We motored out in the main stream and as the wind filled in set sail for Hurst Castle. Finding stronger stream in the middle of the Solent the fleet got separated and the leaders paused in the lee of Hurst to regroup.



The ebb had carried us down and now assisted to spit us out though the narrows taking the inshore route across the bay. The day was very warm with bright sunshine to whole way. Wind never really got above F3 N/NE but pushed us along nicely.

We took the buoyed channel though the sandbanks on arrival at Poole and entered the harbour with no difficulty, although I was surprised at the speed at which the Condor ferry went from a small dot on the horizon to a large monster led by the harbour Masters launch, chasing me into port.



We gathered in Blood Alley, a shallow 'lake' south of Brownsea Island for the overnight anchorage. Another early night was required to catch the tide for St Albans Head and the journey across the bay to Weymouth - not that we wanted to stay up long after the long sail in the sun from Ashlett, so tired but happy we retired for the night.

Pictures - Ashlett Creek at dawn, Siesta at Hurst Castle, Virginia through the narrows, Condor into Poole

Day Three - Poole to Weymouth



Dawn broke in Blood Alley with a beautiful sunrise but no wind. The fleet gathered and made their way out of the harbour towards Anvil Point and St Albans Head. Much discussion had taken place but it was decided that no tide meant no over falls so this is what we aimed for.



We dressed for rough water and washboards and hatches were closed, which was just as well as the over falls at St Albans were quite exciting with water over the deck and the engine powering through the water. But almost as soon as you were in the rough water you found yourself out the other side - a bit like a theme park ride, lots of anticipation and over in seconds.



We found our way barred by a very polite but firm Range boat, directing us to a waypoint some 5 miles off shore, to avoid the guns at Lulworth ranges. With little wind it took some time to cover the ground but we eventually turned astern of another Range boat and set course for Weymouth. As we cleared the range limits on the Weymouth side we did hear several loud guns but no water splashes which was disappointing and does beg the question 'what was the target?'



We arrived in Weymouth at about 15.00 after an early start and spent some time exploring the flesh pots on offer (for that read chandlers, supermarkets and garages for fuel).



Another early start was required to tackle the looming Portland Bill and having sought advice from the Harbour Master that confirmed our passage planning we felt suitably confident to turn in for the night.

Pictures : Richard in Egret dressed for St Albans Head, Simon (accompanied by Mac, the Scottie dog) in Damson en route to Weymouth, the approach to Weymouth harbour, the fleet tied up alongside.

Day Four - Weymouth to Teignmouth

Weymouth harbour was beautiful in the rising sun as we departed.



We motored past Portland Harbour and prepared for the Bill, which in the event was a very calm area of water.



So much so we were able to take photos of each other with the light house in the background. It took 11 ¹/₂ hours to make the crossing of Lyme Bay, much of it under motor in the very light N/NE wind.

Nearer Teignmouth the wind shifted round to S/SW and increased to a nice level F3 or so, but about 2 miles out suddenly got up to the level where a reef was on the cards but with the entrance so close we sailed into the mouth to drop sails and motor to the visitors pontoon.





My parents had come down to see the boat and watched us come in from the point. Once we had tied up and paid the Harbour Master, Humphrey, he kindly used his rib to bring them out to the pontoon, where they had a look round the boat and compared notes with the others. Mum performed a 'christening' ceremony with a glass of bubbly.



The visitors' pontoon is about 30 metres from the shore and we inflated a dinghy to run relays to the shore. A real find was the toilets and shower under the Beachcomber Cafe which is near the pier. Run by Ray, they must be the cleanest public facilities I have ever seen, run with a clear passion for doing a job well. Very entertaining and helpful, Ray was a character to remember.

Photographs - Weymouth harbour at dawn, Leaving Weymouth, Passing Portland harbour, Siesta and Damson at the Bill, Egret towards Teignmouth, Siesta just off Teignmouth, Peter and Mum, Dad having the finer points of Drascombes explained by Richard and Nick.

Day Five - Rest day Teignmouth

The following day was a rest day for most of the fleet, although Simon (and Mac) departed for Dartmouth in order to make the final arrangements for the rally.



The rest of us re-visited Ray at his gleaming facilities, did some shopping and generally relaxed. The sun was so hot I had to make up a temporary bimini cover to find some shade.

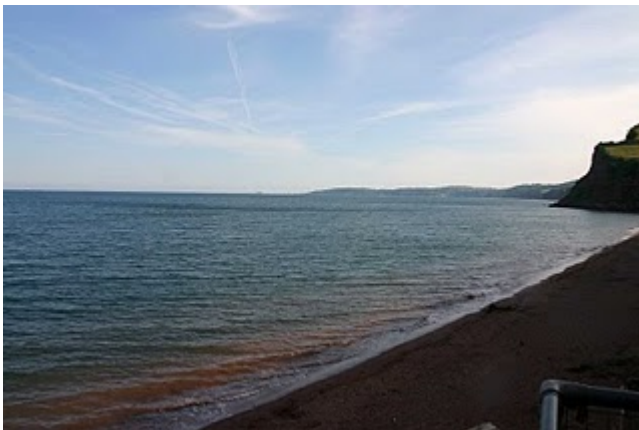


After lunch we caught the ferry across to Shaldon, a small village on the other side of the harbour.





We walked around visiting various places that I had known since a child. Some were the same, others changed beyond recognition. We walked up to the Ness, through the Smugglers tunnel and out onto Ness beach, which provided a great view of our route for the following day.





Returning to the pontoon we had a BBQ and were joined by Mike Lloyd and Derek Wain, two local Drascombers, who were going to sail to the Dart rally on Friday.

Pictures - Simon and Mac returning from a shore visit, Simon departing for Dartmouth in Damson, the shore party, Daislebee with sun cover, Shaldon village, the ferry, Harbour entrance with the Ness headland, Ness beach towards Torquay and Brixham, Richard in the Smugglers tunnel.

Day Six - Teignmouth to Brixham

A leisurely start for us - leaving by 10.00 to catch the tide with a gentle sail down to Babbacombe where we picked up some moorings laid down by the Carey Arms.



Whilst we had lunch a young couple came up through the anchorage, having paddled from Teignmouth, heading for Torquay - a good job it was a calm day or the picnic would have been wet.



Following lunch we had what felt like a brisk sail into Torbay, but the reality was the wind was heading us and progress over the ground was poor, so sails furled and on with the motor into Brixham marina.



The showers at the marina were a godsend and suitably refreshed we headed into town for a curry and to see the sights.

Pictures - Babbacombe Bay and the Carey Arms, Virginia and Siesta moored up, the paddling couple, Brixham from the breakwater entrance, the fleet alongside the visitors' pontoon at Brixham marina.

Day Seven - Brixham to Dartmouth - Join the Rally



The sun rose to reveal another lovely day, so I took the opportunity to wander around Brixham and take some shots without the tourists getting in the way.



The anchor was found in the bay and is thought to be 300 years old - looks in good shape to me.



The replica of the Golden Hind looking pretty in the sunlight



A local trawler manoeuvres in the harbour - the front page in the local paper told the story of a trawler (not this one) running into the breakwater whilst the skipper wasn't paying attention - it apparently sent anglers on the breakwater "reeling" in shock (obviously an ex Sun editor.....).



A sailing smack entering Brixham harbour.

The sail along the coast to Dartmouth was fantastic - especially when this sailing smack came up on us from the west. Peter dipped round behind it to have a good look.



The fleet closed up on the approach to Dartmouth entrance and we were welcomed by members of the fleet that had come up from Plymouth the day before.





We made our way up the harbour to the Dittisham anchorage where the usual Drascombe rafts were formed up, with Daislebee on the end.





An evening ashore with a fish and chip supper went down very well and returning to the raft the moon came up just over the hill.



Day Eight - Dart Rally

Following a briefing from Simon the previous evening, the fleet of 22 or so tan sailed craft (OK 21 Drascombes and a Shrimper) set sail down river and out to sea to r/v offshore at Blackpool Sands. There was a little wind in the river but this soon died as we emerged from the harbour and a motor along the shore was the order on the day.



A cove just beyond Blackpool Sands was selected to avoid the crowds. The sun was hot and the water looked inviting.....but it was a lot quicker getting out than in....



After a leisurely lunch and row round the anchorage the fleet start the return journey, accompanied by Douglas on the flute - "Pied Piper???"



I stopped off on the journey to pick up Jeff Higgins who had travelled down by train from Marlow, including a ride on Thomas the Tank engine, to join me for the return voyage to the Solent.

The wind came up and we sailed most of the way to Tuckenhay where Simon had booked us in for a BBQ at the Malsters Arms - and very nice it was to.



We motored back to Dittisham where we joined the end of a raft and settled down for the night.

Photographs - Chocolate box shore side cottage at Dittisham, Sandy and John Parfitt in Dartmouth, Daislebee with sun cover up, Fleet at Blackpool Sands, Douglas playing us in, BBQ at Tuckenhay, some of the fleet at the quay.

Day Nine - Rally departure

The following day was again sunny and hot. The planned 'Chairmans' manoeuvres were cancelled in preference of a long lie in and breakfast. Most of the trailer fleet pulled out by lunch time had departed for their home ports/addresses, which left the Solent bound fleet to make their way down to Dartmouth to re-stock and linger in whatever shade could be found until the tide turned in favour of the eastbound passage to Brixham. We were joined on the return leg by Miles and Lizzie Tisdall in their Coaster Sundance.

The wind filled in nicely on the trip along the coast and we had a superb sail into the harbour in the evening sun. A local yachtsman even came over and commented how hard he had been trying to catch us.... (possibly not a compliment about the Drascombe/Shrimper performance, rather an observation of ability.....)

Safely tied up we made full use of the facilities again, the marina obligingly deciding to charge us a short stay in view of our early morning departure.



Photograph - Visitors pontoon at Brixham

Day Ten - Brixham across Lyme Bay

The bay was as flat as a mill pond for most of the way across. The only other boat we saw was a local trawler plugging across the bay ahead of us.



We had to anchor in West Bay for several hours to wait for the stream around Portland Bill. Jeff and I tried out the new hand line and caught a couple of mackerel which we filleted and fried as a snack. Once the current turned we set out and made the rounding in quite calm water.



We settled in Weymouth for the night after a long day ready for the next leg of the voyage.

Photographs - A calm bay, Local trawler, Approaching Portland Bill, The lighthouse, Jeff at the helm.

Day Eleven - Weymouth to Poole

We left Weymouth early the next day not only to get the tide around St Albans Head, but also as the Range Officer had indicated that firing from Lulworth would resume at 09.30 over a range of 3.5 miles off shore. This would give us a long offshore leg to complete so we reasoned that by setting off early we would be past the point of no return by the time the military wanted to start firing. As it was we were well through long before the deadline.



Jeff and I popped in to Lulworth Cove for a quick look en route.
We all stopped in Chapman's Pool for coffee and then rounded St Albans Head with quite calm seas.
The wind filled in after that and we had a good sail into Poole past Old Harry.





Once we were anchored up in Blood Alley we were treated to an almost biblical sight - at first we assumed Simon was going to formally christen Mac - it turned out he was in need of a comfort break.....



Photographs - Lulworth Cove, Lizzie rounding the Horn, Skylark romping along, Old Harry Rocks, Gandalf and his pet.....

Day Twelve - Poole to Cowes and onwards

Another early start on a very low tide caused a few minor moments in Blood Alley for the deeper keeled Drifters but we were soon out in the Looe Channel heading across the bay for Hurst.



We met Barry Fudge waiting on the point for us, where we had a chat over VHF before using the rest of the tide to swiftly take us up the Solent to Cowes. En route we were chased up the channel by some magnificent yachts. Simon left the main fleet to make his way to Ashlett to haul out.



The rest of us made Cowes in good time and spent a lazy afternoon on the pontoons before adjourning to an Italian restaurant to celebrate the completion of the voyage. From Cowes the rest of the fleet would disperse to their various ports.



Jeff and I left that evening for a night sail back to Chichester. One of the yachts that had overtaken us in the Solent was moored up just outside Cowes as we left.



The Solent was a totally different place at night and following the lights across towards Chichester was an interesting experience. We anchored at Itchenor to spend the rest of the night before mooring up in Chichester marina the following morning.

The voyage was complete - a journey of nearly 350 miles in total - not bad considering, as Peter Tiplady put it "to think three weeks ago your boat was a large drum of epoxy". It was a great experience, in great company, with superb weather the whole way there and back.

Now looking forward to the next adventure.

*Photographs - The fleet departs Blood Alley, two monsters in the Solent, the fleet in
Shepherds Wharf Cowes, the gang (l- r, me, Jeff, Nick, Lizzie, Richard, Miles, Peter), Night
scene*