

Bumbling up the Butley Creek

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We had been planning to explore the River Butley for many years. It is a tributary to the River Ore and the two rivers meet opposite Havergate Island. In mid September we at last found a window in the miserable weather .

We set off on a Saturday afternoon from the Deben and had a pleasant sail up the coast to Shingle Street, into the entrance to the River Ore, and arrived in the Butley Creek soon after low tide. The river winds past an ancient disused quay, a ferry (not often in use) and then some oyster beds. We had not been past these before and this time we sailed up the channel until we went aground. We dropped anchor and settled down for the night.

Sunday morning came with clear blue skies. High water would be at 12.30pm and after washing up the breakfast things we weighed anchor intending to motor on upstream as far as we could but drop anchor not later than 9.30. The aim was then to row the inflatable up to Butley Mills which we could see about two miles away as the crow flies. We chugged up the channel in a magical setting. The mud was still showing and it was covered with a variety of different types of bird. At one time we disturbed a flock of avocets.



At 9.30 we anchored BC and took to the dinghy. We rowed between the flat mud banks which rapidly closed in on us as we zig-zagged our way towards the distance mills. We could see a bed of reeds ahead but had no idea what area they covered nor if there was a channel through them.



The channel was quite wide as we entered the reeds but it was not long before it closed in on us and after ten minutes it was too narrow to use the oars and we had to make our way by grasping handfuls of reeds and pulling ourselves forward.



It was another twenty minutes before Gillie cried out “I can see a house!” We broke out into a small pond below “Butley Mill Sluice No. 2” as stated on the notice. We clambered out of the dinghy and looked back over the reed beds from where we had come. It was quite impossible to work out the track.



The mills had been converted into luxury flats and stood the other side of a country lane which crossed the stream at this point. There was a mill pond at the back with an attractive wooden balcony overlooking it.



By now it was 11.00am and we decided that we should start rowing back no later than 1pm. By then the tide would have started to ebb but we should have enough time to get back to BC and take her into deeper water. So we had enough time to explore the place. Within five minutes we had walked into a little village Chillingsford where we found The Froize Inn. The proprietor who was working outside said it opened at 11.30 am, so we rang our son to suggest that he and his family meet us there for a drink about that time. This gave us enough time for a short walk across the fields. We found ourselves overlooking the river and we had a good view of the reed bed up to the mills in one direction and the winding river to BC in the other.



We got back to the pub in time to meet up with our son's family and celebrated our little achievement. They then accompanied us back to the mills and saw us off into the reeds. They were able to plot our course as every few minutes we raised an oar above the reeds.



We arrive safely at the far end of the reeds and sped down with the increasing current to find BC still afloat. It was fortunate that we had our Garmin GPSMAP which showed us the winding line of the channel. Without this we should surely have taken the wrong route and been trapped aground for another ten hours. We hoisted sail and returned back to the Ferry in time for a late tea. Mission accomplished!