

wave length

csc magazine

**CHRISTOPH AND OLEG BRAVE
THE FASTNET ON FELIX**

PETER THOMAS HEADS NORTH

**PETER DENNING
GOES ELECTRIC**

**AND NIGEL
GETS WET!**



SPITBANK FORT

The four

SOLENT FORTS





Wavelength
Marion Tempest

WELCOME

to this latest edition. It's been a stormy autumn so far making for challenging sailing, Christoph and Oleg certainly had a far from easy Fastnet, Peter Thomas and Patrick had a very cold sail in Norway, Nigel got soaked on his birthday, the only sailors who had great weather were Polly Agatha in the Pilot

Cutters Review, but then again that was back in May. As Tom Cunliffe asked in his recent talk at the club "Why do we bother?" Tom said the answer to his question included freedom, spirit and adventure, which sums it up nicely. As always I need your stories and pictures, Wavelength wouldn't exist without them, so keep sending them in thank you. Happy sailing!
Marion

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CLUB NIGHT
Channel Sailing Club meets
every Wednesday at Ashtead
Cricket Club, Woodfield Lane,
Ashtead, Surrey KT21 2BJ.
Doors open at 8pm. Prospective
members welcome.

THE CLUB SENDS OUT
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CHOPPY WATERS

The clocks have gone back, it's cold and rainy and the 2023 sailing season is drawing to a close. Whether it is climate change or not, this year's sailing has been a roller coaster of hot sunshine, thunderstorms, torrential rain and high winds. Sometimes in a single day. As a sailing instructor who is on the water regularly, I've experienced all of these things in short periods of time, often with novice sailors on board.

But it is always heartening when students get to experience the extremes of modern British weather as they learn to sail a yacht.

It seems the Channel Sailing Club occasionally experiences its own windows of 'poor weather'. Events can be sparsely attended, leading to frustrating cancellations for organisers and those few who sign up early. On other occasions, people leave registering for an event until the last minute, making it difficult to get berths and book restaurants or sailing clubs for an evening get together.

While the race series at CSC is well attended by a hard core of members and their boats, the cruising side has faltered in the past year.

We are encouraging



members who don't particularly want to race, to join the race crews at their destination and enjoy an evening with them.

I did just that for the two-handed race at the end of September.

I wanted to take a couple of crew - including a non-member friend and a relatively new member Mo Campbell, but didn't feel like racing. Plus we were three on board, so would not qualify as two-handed! We joined the race crews at their destination at Berthon marina in Lymington and had a great time with a meal at Royal Lymington Yacht Club.

There has been some feeling in the past that non-race boats have been excluded from joining a race event in the evening, but we were made to feel most welcome by everyone.

So I would encourage

people to make what is a racing event into a cruising event of their own and use it to mix with other members away from the clubhouse.

The last sailing of event of 2024 is proving to be one of the most popular of the year. I refer, of course, to the famous Icicle cruise to Cowes. In the past it has been a highly organised affair with entertainment, fancy dress, decorated boats and a black-tie dinner in a prestigious sailing club on the Isle of Wight. Costs were rising, so this year's event has been scaled back to a cruise (perhaps informal race) to Cowes, with a more casual dinner at The Union pub.

At the time of writing, more than 30 members have signed up, so there is still an appetite for sailing, even if it is in December.

So I would encourage more members to sign up for events in 2024 in order to keep the club really active. The 2024 calendar is on the website now and there are a range of shorter cruises planned which may suit the busy lifestyles of members who cannot commit to too many days away.

Fair winds and safe harbours to all in CSC in 2024.
Simon

Christoph Friedrich has a ...

Challenging Fastnet

2023, ANOTHER FASTNET YEAR. Surely, for the 50th edition of that famous race, one would be right to expect Champagne sailing conditions!

Having registered only seconds after the website opened in early January, there was the familiar search for a two-handed partner. Using the above tag line, I reached out to club member Oleg Lebedev. Having sailed with him before, we soon found common ground. Oleg came down to Marchwood in March to inspect Felix. And then we were off to completing the qualifying races, Channel Race and Eddystone, both finishing in Cowes to accommodate our busy schedules. After attending the first aid course refresher run by charming Caroline Chapman, we were all set for the start.

Not quite - a rig check in mid June revealed a chuffed lower shroud. The mast had to come down. After a few frantic calls, JTR Rigging in Endeavour Quay said they could fit it in. The lower shrouds were replaced the week before the race start, and Felix was back in Marchwood Wednesday July 19.

All this while, the forecasts for the July 22 start looked ever more daunting. 'Gusty conditions at the start, but it will pass quickly' was the comment from the friendly RORC officer, when I picked up the tracker on Friday.

The race started on Saturday in gale-force southwesterlies. There was some discussion about delaying the start to Sunday, but as another Low was expected Wednesday in the Celtic Sea, RORC decided to go ahead. As a concession, the two-handed fleet did



FASTNET FACT BOX

- The Fastnet Race is a biennial offshore yacht race organized by the Royal Ocean Racing Club (RORC) with the assistance of the Royal Yacht Squadron in Cowes and the City of Cherbourg in France.
- The race is named after the Fastnet Rock off southern Ireland, which the race course rounds. Along with Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and the Newport-Bermuda Race, it is considered one of the classic big offshore races with each distance approximately 625 nautical miles (719 mi; 1,158 km). Testing both inshore and offshore skills, boat and crew preparation and speed potential. From its inception, the Fastnet Race has proven highly influential in the growth of offshore racing and remains closely linked to advances in yacht design, sailing technique and safety equipment.
- The Fastnet Race has been sponsored by the Swiss watch manufacturing company Rolex since 2001. The Race prize is known as the Fastnet Challenge Cup.
- The race's main focus is on monohull handicap racing, which is presently conducted under the Royal Ocean Racing Club's own IRC Rating Rule, which is awarded the overall trophy. However, the race has recently opened to more classes, including multihulls and providing one design class starts for the Volvo Ocean Race Class, IMOCA 60 and Class40. It has also seen an increase in participation in double-handed racing.

Course

- The Fastnet is a challenging race. Taking place in August, the race is often provided with Westerlies that are strong to gale force in strength. The succession of low pressure systems which advance on Ireland and Britain across the North Atlantic Ocean provide a constantly moving weather pattern for which Fastnet navigators must plan. These depressions are mostly centered north of the English Channel. Knowledge of where meteorological disturbances are likely to occur, and how best to use them, is the keynote to success in the race.

not have to rig a trysail at the start in these conditions. Starting order was changed so that faster boats started first, our class was the last to start.

Over 100 retired

As we tacked up the Solent in 35+ kts and poor visibility, we deliberated whether we should seek shelter. We observed competitors anchoring (or picking up a buoy?) outside Yarmouth in atrocious conditions. Some were returning as we continued our progress to Hurst. We decided to carry on even if progress would be slow. Once past the north channel, we were more or less committed, as the options to shelter became more limited. The Needles were out of the question in these conditions. Out of 430 boats that started, over 100 had retired in the first 24 hours with several boats dismantled and one boat sunk (near the Needles).

The first night proved very challenging, we battled the strong headwinds and extremely choppy conditions after Poole Bay as we headed across St. Albans. Conditions became more settled on Sunday morning. We passed Lyme Bay, having swapped from the storm jib to the No. 3. We were conscious to remain close

Out of 430 boats that started, over 100 had retired in the first 24 hours with several boats dismantled and one boat sunk (near the Needles).

to the rhumb line, and at midnight on Sunday we passed Plymouth. A pleasant sail in a clear night along the Cornish coast followed. We ended up a bit too far south of the Lizard, which made for an arduous sail towards the Scilly Isles as strong northwesterly and extremely choppy conditions returned. We had to go close in to St. Mary's just to get to the foredeck and swap back to the storm jib. That night my lifejacket auto-inflated due to the wet conditions on board. We noticed a couple of competitors passing south of the Scillies which, as we found out only later, was actually allowed under the sailing instructions.

Once past the Scillies, the sea state improved. On Tuesday, we were hoping to make good progress, only to be becalmed for several hours halfway up to the Fastnet. At least it gave us a chance to dry out, take stock and charge the batteries. We had not eaten many warm meals since the start. However, we were aware of another low coming on



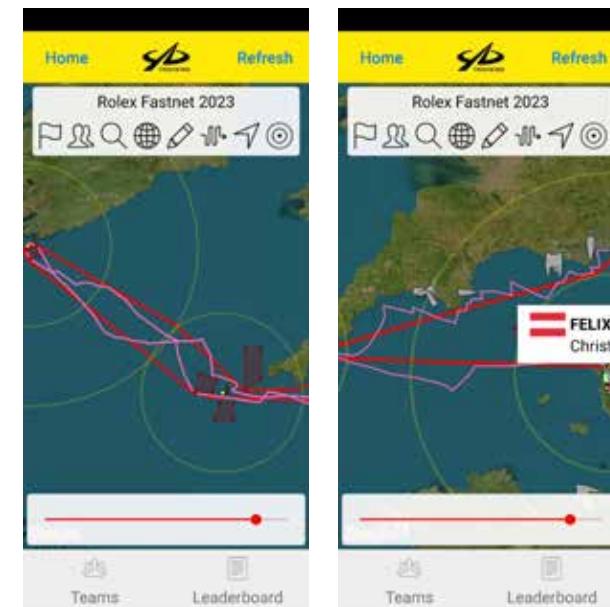
Wednesday by which time we hoped to be well past Fastnet. As the wind picked up we were able to hoist the spinnaker for several hours.

A wild sea

We rounded Fastnet on Wednesday morning in cold, rainy conditions. A couple of hours later we swapped back to the Storm jib, and 3 reefs in the main, as the strong southwesterly set in. For the next 30 hours we had 35+ kts and a wild

sea. We had to choose between bearing away off the rhumb line, to avoid getting completely soaked every time a wave broke, or hurtling through. We did a bit of both, as we merely tried to survive the night. On Thursday morning we finally passed the SW tip of the traffic separation zone off the Scillies.

The downwind run to Cherbourg saw us gybing in ever changing wind conditions. The tide had changed in our favour, and



Out of 358 IRC boats, only 201 finished. Felix came 168th. In the two-handed class, only 45 out of 96 had finished.

we passed Alderney around 4pm on Friday. Having dropped the spinnaker shortly after passing Cap de La Hague, we were close reaching into Cherbourg hoping to make it in time for a bite to eat. However, the final approach to Cherbourg proved tricky once again as the wind completely dropped. We finally crossed the finish after 8pm, after having ghosted along the harbour wall.

Out of 358 IRC boats, only 201 had finished,

Felix came 168th. In the 2-handed class, only 45 out of 96 had finished. We had sailed 830 miles on the close to 700 miles course which leaves some scope for improvement.

After a night's rest and a tasty sandwich lunch, courtesy of Oleg who was by now the chief cook on board, we returned to Marchwood SC, making it on a single tack in 12 hours from pontoon to pontoon. If only the conditions during the Fastnet had been like that!

Wettest birthday celebration

We all share a birthday with someone and at some point, we all must have looked in the appropriate pages of The Times, Western Morning News or the Daily Mail although these days it is likely to be Google. In my case I share mine with a real character, a legend in his own lifetime (well in CSC at least) – I speak of none other than Pete Thomas himself!

Like him I have had some

odd celebrations, in various places and often while on holiday.

This year it was hopefully going to be on a Scottish Isle with a glass of fine malt whisky. Sadly, the yacht I was going to join never made it past Cornwall – no matter the Scilly Isles would do.

After a good sail in sunshine and fair wind we made it to Scilly and picked up a buoy in St

Mary's – bright sunshine, a magnificent sunset bode well for the following days.

But out there in the Atlantic, trouble was brewing. Anxiously we watched the forecast, the blobs of red on XEweather and Windguru grew in front our eyes on the PC. Sometimes it seemed to ease and then return, the strength eased and then grew again, sometimes it was only for a

couple of hours but it seemed to build and build.

In the end we did the seaman like thing and after only two nights decided to leave and found space in the inner dock in Penzance. On our sail back we came across three other yachts under spinnaker having a good sail heading west not east – had we done the right thing?

On Friday August 18 we had our answer. The picture

below tells it all. The wind hit 50 knots and given that we were by then well sheltered out in the bay it would have been much higher.

Waves hit the sea wall, cleared the road completely and landed on the buildings opposite.

That night we donned oilie jackets to walk-run the 150 yards to the restaurant. Wishing to take a picture out to sea I popped my head

round the corner, caught a wave full on and arrived ready for dinner looking like a very drowned rat.

I could not complain, I enjoyed some very nice fish, had an excellent whiskey courtesy of my skipper's drinks cabinet – probably my wettest birthday celebration but a memorable one nonetheless!

Nigel Barraclough



Waves hit the sea wall, cleared the road completely and landed on the buildings opposite.

Peter Denning upgrades his outboard motor

Going electric...

OVER THE YEARS I have managed to collect three Yamaha Malta 2-stroke outboards. Nice engines but all have suffered from blocked jets that affect starting and running. The small amount that I use them doesn't help, as anchoring close in it is easier to row or paddle the dinghy to a landing point. Back in May 2023 with a few other club boats we met in Newtown and while the Malta ran well it did not like five adults in the dinghy as the exhaust back pressure was too much so developed no power.

I then started to look at electric outboards for my dinghy. The two main contenders are ePropulsion and Torqeedo. There are a few other makes appearing such as the French Temo but there is limited information on how they perform.

I ended up short listing the Torqeedo Travel 1103 and ePropulsion Spirit Plus. There is very little difference between them except the 'Travel' has a slightly higher speed while the 'Spirit' has a bigger battery.

Following a visit to Nestaway Boats at Christchurch I ended up purchasing the ePropulsion

Spirit Plus. I went for range rather than top speed.

The range has proved to be OK with one up and slightly less with two on board.

The outboard comes with a 240V slow charger that takes about 8-10 hours to charge the battery from 'flat'. This is fine if you stay in marinas all the time but I prefer to be at anchor in some shallow backwater.

Boat battery worries

This meant that I had recharge anxiety, so I bought an ePropulsion 12 volt charger for the battery but realised that this would flatten my boat batteries. I only have an outboard that gives 10 amps charge power plus a couple of small solar panels that keep the batteries topped up.

I bought the ePropulsion 100 watt portable solar panel that seemed to work well and can be angled to the sun. If the outboard gets heavy use, this set up will struggle to keep up the charging. I suspect that I will end up buying a fast charger (3 hours) so that if I motor ashore to a pub, etc. I can top the battery up while having a drink. If I do this a 'donation' for the power used will be required.

Having actually used the

dinghy and outboard (2 up) on the Bastille cruise in 2023 it has performed very well in taking us ashore countless times at Alderney and then using the solar panel to put some charge back in. It also got used at Omonville La Rogue (between Alderney and Cherbourg).

Overall, the range is more than adequate for everyday use as long as the power is kept at 50% or less. This does knock the speed down but like a car the range is improved by a much greater percentage. I suspect that the type of dinghy also has a big impact on 'performance'.

Expensive bit of kit

The outboard is expensive so has a padlocked bar across the clamps. The battery, being removable, I lock onto the wooden seat of the dinghy so it can't be connected on to the motor unit and the final 'deterrent' is to keep the kill cord—actually a fancy magnet—in my pocket. I am now also considering ways of securing the oars so that they cannot be used.

Still early days, but I have been impressed how this performs but still have the Malta on board just in case I need to make a long trip. Whether the Malta will work is another matter.



The outboard is expensive so has a padlocked bar across the clamps



The battery, being removable, I lock onto the wooden seat of the dinghy

SOCIAL Events



Happy Halloween!

The Halloween evening organised by Linda Varney and Peter Thomas was a fun evening at the club. Several members dressed appropriately and there was a prize for the best (or should that be worst) dressed. After a meal of delicious dips, chilli and red velvet cake members took part in a fiendish quiz and carved spooky pumpkins. Many thanks to Linda and Peter and everyone else who helped out on the evening with cooking, serving and cleaning later.



Why do we bother?

Tom Cunliffe's latest talk at the CSC

Celebrated sailing author Tom Cunliffe entertained a full house on his latest visit to the Channel Sailing Club in early November.

In a talk entitled "Why do we bother?", Tom questioned why sailors venture out to sea in all weathers, take on long-distance challenges and putting up with hardship just to fulfill their love of sailing.

A packed house at our Ashted HQ listened intently as Tom described some tough sailing trips "to like childbirth", according to his wife Ros, who was in the audience. Indeed, Tom highlighted the contribution his wife had made to many of their sailing trips, particularly when they were both young and starting out on some big nautical adventures.

As always Tom's humorous talk was full of anecdotes about his long sailing career and illustrated with fascinating photos of him and Ros as they crossed oceans.

Tom said weather and 'cock-ups' governed most people's time at sea.

When it came to weather, he said sailors are forced to put up with the weather they face, sometimes making a trip challenging,

but always rewarding at the destination.

He said sailors can experience lots of cock-ups, especially when it comes to berthing in difficult conditions, but getting it right can be very rewarding.

Tom recounted one of his first voyages as crew on a wooden sailing barge, which he spent re-fitting in the Hamble before setting off for the West Indies. He said he cut his teeth on boat building and repairs during that valuable episode.

One of his first trips with wife Ros was on a 32ft pilot cutter setting off from Rio in Brazil to the UK. They covered more than 2,000NM, and had to repair the tiller with six-inch nails after it broke off in stormy seas.

Tom said the answers to his question "Why do we bother?" included freedom, spirit and adventure.

Boats can offer sailors freedom from the challenges of everyday life, while he said reading a good book like War and Peace or Moby Dick on a long voyage can offer spiritual relief.

Meanwhile, nothing beats the sense of adventure from a proper ocean crossing.

Tom was widely applauded and signed copies of his many sailing books which were on sale during the evening.

The RNLI also manned a table selling Christmas cards, toys, calendars and other merchandise, raising £465 for the charity.

Afterwards, everyone agreed it had been a great night at the club.



Mulled wine and mince pies

The final event of the CSC social calendar is the minced pies and mulled wine evening, on **Wednesday December 13**. Although this event is free to members social secretary Jane Beddoe asks that members register online so we have an idea of numbers for catering.

The last sailing event of 2023

The Icicle will go ahead as a cruise to Cowes followed by dinner at The Union pub. The date for this cruise has changed from the December 2/3 to the following weekend **Dec 9/10**. Briefing on Wed Dec 6 at the club house. For more details contact organiser Nick Harman.

Forts or 'follies'

The history of the four forts between the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth

The forts built to protect Portsmouth Dockyard and naval base have been labelled 'Palmerston's Follies' as they were constructed at massive expense to defend England against an enemy that never came.

The Solent forts were ordered to be constructed by Lord Palmerston in response to a Royal Commission Report in 1859 that had looked into the threat of a French invasion under their then Emperor Napoleon III.

In the 80 or so years that they were occupied by the military, they scarcely fired a gun in anger – despite two World Wars having been fought during this period.

The work on the forts began in 1865 and took 15 years to complete. The total cost of building the four forts was £1,177, 805 – around £115million in today's value.

The forts have 15ft thick granite walls plus armour plating. Their construction is a testament to the skills of Victorian engineers. Large stone blocks were used as foundations, transported from a quarry by train, and then by barge before being

set in place by divers.

Given the strength of the Royal Navy – the largest in the world at the time – the Germans made no attempt to attack Portsmouth by sea during World War I, and the Solent Forts saw out the war as expensive, heavily armoured spectators. However, No Man's Land and Horse Sand Forts were used as navy signalling stations.

The Solent forts were manned again during World War II, but it was an unattractive posting. Life on site was said to have been grim, and those serving their country there were deliberately chosen based on their inability to swim, to avoid any attempts at escape.

The main threat at this time was from submarines. Between No Man's Fort and Horse Sand Fort, a boom defence was rigged. The forts were damaged from air strikes, a line of attack for which they had not been prepared as they were built to defend Portsmouth against sea attack.

In 1956, coastal artillery was abolished, leaving the 4 forts empty and unused.

Spitbank Fort

Spitbank is the fort closest to Portsmouth. Its construction began in 1867 and was completed in 1878. It is smaller than the other Solent forts, being 162ft in diameter.

This fort was declared surplus to requirements in 1962 and declared a scheduled monument in 1967. It was sold by the Ministry of Defence to a private buyer in 1982, following which it was opened to the public as a museum. From 2002, the site was used as a location for Banged up with Beadle when television personality Jeremy Beadle was incarcerated there for 6 weeks. It was also used as a venue for psytrance and hard dance parties.

Spitbank Fort was sold – reportedly for over £1 million – in 2002. It was subsequently renovated at a cost of around £2.6 million and used as a luxury hotel.

It is currently for sale with an asking price in excess of £3 million.

Horse Sand Fort

Horse Sand Fort lies in the middle of the Solent, between Spitbank and No Man's Forts. It was built between 1865 and 1880, and it is larger than Spitbank Fort with a diameter of 200ft.

In the late 19th century,



Horse Sand Fort was painted in black and white chequers as a form of dazzle camouflage. The pattern is still visible in some spots.

It was bought in 2012 by Clarenco LLP (who also now own No Man's and Spitbank forts). The intention was to turn it into a museum. However, renovation work was apparently held up in 2018 by the presence of a resident family of peregrine falcons.

In 2015, the fort appeared in an episode of BBC TV's Antiques Road Trip.

Horse Sand Fort was sold in 2021 to an unnamed buyer for a reported sum of £715,000

No Man's Fort

No Man's Fort, which lies just 1.4 miles off the coast of the Isle of Wight, was built between 1865 and 1880.

It was originally almost

identical to Horse Sand Fort. However, after being decommissioned, it was used as a luxury home/hospitality centre for upmarket clients. It has an indoor swimming pool and 2 helipads.

In July 2004, Legionella bacteria were found in the fort's water supply, forcing its closure. In 2006, its owners – Lexi Holdings – went into receivership. In 2008, Harmesh Pooni – claiming to be the owner – barricaded himself inside the fort in protest against the administrators KPMG.

In 2009, it was sold to Clarenco LLP for £910,000. It was opened as a hotel in 2015. It is currently on the market with an asking price of £3.6million.

In 1972, No Man's Fort was used as the location for the Doctor Who serial, The Sea Devils, starring Jon Pertwee as the Doctor.

St Helen's Fort

St Helen's Fort was completed in 1878 at a cost of £123,311 (around £12 million in today's value). Unlike the other Solent forts, building material was carried along a causeway to the fort from St Helen's quarry. In World War II, the fort was used as a searchlight and anti-aircraft gun platform. The heavy armaments were not popular with local householders as the concussion broke windows during firing practice. After the war, it had a role as a navigational lighthouse.

The fort is, of course, famous for the unofficial mass 'fort walk', which happens at the lowest tides in August. At this time, the causeway is generally above sea level. However, emergency services have frequently advised residents and visitors not to attempt the walk due to the dangers of being cut off by the tide.

The fort is in private hands and not open to the public. Any potential resident would have no access to public services, although there is a water supply through an artesian well.

Warren Whitmore

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This year fellow club member and Frenchman Patrick Regnault and I joined leg one of this year's trip, from Tromsø to Bodø in Norway.

North in a Southerly

Peter Thomas' latest adventure has a bumpy start

It was my third trip on Sheeaun, a Southerly 47.

The first trip was from Chichester in Hampshire to Kilrush in Ireland, the second from Wick in Scotland to Florø in Norway, as reported in Wavelength summer 2019 and autumn 2022 respectively.

This year fellow club member and Frenchman Patrick Regnault and I joined leg one of this year's trip, from Tromsø to Bodø in Norway.

The Arctic Circle has a latitude of approximately 66°30', Tromsø some 200 miles further north. Which

means there would be snow on the hills and mountains, 24 hour daylight, and it would be cold. Bloody cold.

So, it started badly. We left Gatwick for Oslo to get a connecting flight to Tromsø. At Oslo arrivals, Patrick joined the EU queue and got through passport control within a few minutes. I joined the "other" passport queue together with passengers from all over the world, and over two hours later passed through passport control only to have missed the flight to Tromsø. However, there was space on the next flight later that

evening which I had to pay for myself. On arrival in Tromsø, my luggage was missing. I did not relish the prospect of buying a complete set of clothing and winter waterproofs, but fortunately my luggage arrived on the morning flight,

On this sort of trip, where you have crew changes on a weekly basis, it is important to arrive the following Saturday at the next crew change on time, in our case at Bodø.

So, we had to do a lot of motoring. In a 47' Southerly, this wasn't so bad. The first day we had a 42 mile trip



to Finnsnes, then 62m to Vindheim, 69m to Svolvær, 33m to Nusfjord, 52m to Landegode and finally 21m to Bodø.

The majority of the trip was in between islands, all connected by high road bridges, with snow covered hills, cold winds from the wrong direction, no other yachts and few other boats, fish farms, and lots of “please pass my gloves”.

The restaurants ashore were great, but fortunately for my bank balance we ate aboard a few times.

We saw no Northern Lights (because it was 24 hour daylight), humpback or killer whales, seals or sea eagles. But it was fantastic, the scenery was great.

After we arrived home, the BBC in its Amazing Hotels series featured Nusfjord Artic Resort, where we moored up, which is a 200 year old preserved fishing community in the Lofoten Islands. We ate in their restaurant, tried but didn't really enjoy whale, bought really expensive Norwegian beer and enjoyed fresh bread from their bakery.

The plan for next year is that Sheeun will spend the season in the Baltic, visiting Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany and Denmark. I've already agreed to sign up for one leg when the programme is published.



Nigel Barraclough is...

TRIPPING UP OVER HISTORY

I am always on the look out for blue plaques set in the walls of buildings and curiosity means I can't resist reading them – you never know what you will find out.

Here are two I found in Dartmouth this year:

John Davis was one of the chief navigators of Queen Elizabeth I. He led several voyages to discover the Northwest Passage and served as pilot and captain on both Dutch and English voyages to the East Indies. He discovered the Falkland Islands in 1592.

Davis was born in Devon circa 1550, and spent his childhood in Sandridge Barton. He learned much of his seamanship as a child while playing boats along the river Dart, and went to sea at an early age. His childhood neighbours included Humphrey Gilbert and his half-brother Walter Raleigh.

In 1583 he began pitching a voyage in search of the Northwest Passage to the queen's secretary and two years later, funded the expedition, which traced Frobisher's route to Greenland's east coast, around Cape Farewell, and west towards Baffin Island. In 1586 he returned to the Arctic with four ships, two of which were sent to Greenland's eastern



shore; the other two penetrated the strait which came to bear his name as far as 67N before being blocked by the Arctic ice cap.

His invention of the backstaff and double quadrant (called the Davis quadrant) was popular among English seamen until long after Hadley's reflecting quadrant had been introduced.

He became pilot-master for the East India Company but was killed by pirates near Singapore in 1605.

Sir Humphrey Gilbert was an English adventurer, explorer, MP and soldier who served during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and was a pioneer of the English colonial empire in North America and the Plantations of Ireland. He was a half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh.

Gilbert's life was spent in a series of failed maritime expeditions, the financing of which exhausted his family fortune.

He became one of the leading advocates for the then-mythical Northwest Passage to Cathay (China) a country thought to have abundance of riches. During

the winter of 1566 he and a personal adversary of his, Anthony Jenkinson (who had sailed to Russia and crossed that country down to the Caspian Sea), argued the pivotal question of polar routes before Queen Elizabeth. Gilbert claimed that any northeast passage was far too dangerous: “the air is so darkened with continual mists and fogs so near the pole that no man can well see either to guide his ship or direct his course.

By logic and reason, a north-west passage was assumed to exist, and Columbus had discovered America with far less

evidence; it was imperative for England to catch up, to settle in new lands, and thus to challenge the Iberian powers. Money was found for an expedition. Martin Frobisher was appointed captain and left England in 1576, but the quest for a north-west passage failed: Frobisher returned with a cargo of a black stone – which was found to be worthless – and a native inuit.

He died when his ship, the Squirrel over gunned and unfit for sailing sank in a storm near the Azores in September 1583.



Pilot Cutter Review 2023



Pilot Cutters, at anchor, St Mawes



St Mawes

Mark Hawkins tells us of the Pilot Cutter Review earlier this year in May

I cannot tell you how pleased I was to get another invite to crew on the lovely Polly Agatha. Last year's Classic Channel regatta, taking in the Beautiful Dartmouth and wonderful Paimpol was such a fantastic experience, and now, yet another major calendar event! This time the Pilot Cutter Review, out of the beautiful St Mawes.

Heading off from Port Solent

Same crowd as last year, Jeremy John, Reece James, Tom Ainsworth and myself. We all met on the Tuesday at Port Solent around 7.30pm, stowed all our gear and had dinner at one of the restaurants surrounding the marina, the plan was to sail straight to Fowey. The trip

was approx. 150NM, we needed to be at Fowey for the start of the passage race on Thursday to St Mawes.

We set off at midnight and locked out of Port Solent. Once into the Solent we settled into a watch system of 2hrs on 2hrs off, Reece and I, Tom and Jeremy.

After 24 hours we were having gearbox worries and decided to head towards Dartmouth just in case Jeremy found something terminal. Luckily it was fixable and we swung around for Fowey. By now the wind had filled in, and we were more sailing than motor sailing and by 6am we had arrived. It was a super sail from Dartmouth, wind was perfect and we managed to do the whole trip on one tack.



We tied up on our reserved pontoon, we ended the trip with beers and a rum or two for me, and yes at 6.30am. Needless to say we took it easy for the rest of the day and mostly napped, in the evening we ate at the Gallants Sailing club, very convivial evening.

Friday centred on the passage race, following the arrival throughout Thursday, of all the pilot cutter participants. Start was at, or

around 10am, we started about 10 minutes past, this was okay but needed to record your time over the line, there were three behind but all else were 10 minutes ahead!! Polly got up to speed quickly, was slow progress but felt good within the fleet, boats behind weren't closing and the boats ahead were getting nearer, only one, Eran Mor seemed to be matching our speed! Soon we were free of the rest, and closing on the lead boat, neck and neck at one point, but they sailed close in, especially around Gerrans Bay and up around Killgerran head, local knowledge probably, but they certainly scored from it and finished slightly ahead of Polly.

St Mawes was stunning, The evening was spent at the Bohemia bar where we were briefed on the

weekends sailing, an unusual format, around the cans, short legs and only half the race publicised, second half of the race announced as you arrive at the midway point, the race is within Falmouth Harbour, right outside St Mawes, the race is split between the harbour and Carrick Roads depending on tide, sea state, and the speed of the overall fleet, they kind of mix it up to give everyone a fair crack!

St. Mawes anchorage

Immense fun, very interesting and wow, what a location! All the pilot cutters were anchored in St Mawes, that in itself was a sight to behold, a lovely view from all angles, and Polly viewed them all as we slipped back on the anchor several times. Polly is not a replica, she's a pilot cutter built in 2007 All the same materials,

traditional shipbuilding just a few years later, she was built to the same lines as Peggy a sister ship but with modern electronics and a cosier interior... on deck, every bit gaff! It has winches but they're hardly used, most all is sweated, winches on the rare occasion!

Polly was built by traditional shipbuilder Dave Cockwell of Cockwells, Mylor Creek Boatyard in Falmouth. Jeremy had contacted Dave and invited him to skipper Polly on the Saturday, we also had Alex, Tom, Reece, obviously Jeremy, and myself, the latter four are all old hands on Polly, for Alex it was his first time on a 24-tonne gaff rigged cutter! Dave was commanding as skipper, and understood Polly from the outset, his commands meant nothing to most of us, only understood by Reece and Jeremy... he was quickly ordering rig adjustments, better suited to a lazy Sunday sail, but instilled panic in the crew ten minutes before a race.

Polly has a lot to prove

And not just a race, Polly was a soft resident of the Solent, we had taken Polly to her hometown, to race her childhood counterparts, all eyes were on us, we had to show our mettle, but these guys know the area,



Dave Cockwell and Alex

the nuances, the tide... and where the bloody buoys are! Polly had a lot to prove, so Dave's orders were followed to the letter, (what we could understand) well as close as we could achieve on the day! I do remember him calling one tranche of tacking a set of ridiculousness. The accent was hard enough, but that was quite clear!! We did get better from a navigator's point of view it was a steep learning curve, like 0-60 in 4 seconds, I fed the routes into my iPhone direct from the VHF instruction, then shared it across to the iPad

for Dave. Technology has its weak points, but thankfully it worked on the day. It was a pleasure crewing for him, he had a fabulous connection with Polly, and we all learned from the experience.

For the evening the organisers had booked us on to the Raun pontoon, was an unusual thing, to put us on a pontoon miles from anywhere, no walk ashore, apparently it's a spectacular area and was for our benefit, to experience the beauty! Well we were not disappointed, up through Carrick roads, the river Fal



Rum barge

Left to right Mark, Tom, Reece and Alex

and then into the river Truro, we followed Eran Mor but they went aground on one of the meanders up the river, was a good feeling to pass such an experienced crew, we tied up, the place was stunning, and the silence was incredible, a rum barge was moored opposite us which really came to life later. We ate spaghetti bolognese and drank large amounts of cocktails from the barge, I had an especially nice mojito, rum heaven! a really lovely evening.

On the Sunday we had a fair trip back down to St Mawes, but they catered for that and only had the afternoon race. We were back in the command of Jeremy, I think he was relieved to be calling the shots on this one, same format race as Saturday and

the racing was great fun, some wind would have been good, and we were a man down!

We had a bad start but we did get going and ghosted past most of the fleet all the same, again it was Eran Mor ahead, I think we had them on the run, they looked very jittery, and this was confirmed when they popped a gennaker!! Yes, a bloody gennaker, on a pilot cutter!! Not enough that they had ten crew, all with honed skills from racing Falmouth work boats for 30 yrs plus. But hey, was very satisfying and we came second again on the water, without a gennaker! We anchored off St Mawes and got ashore for supplies for the trip home, for the evening we had meals booked in the sailing club

and a prize giving! Obviously, there were handicaps to apply but we felt we did okay, we never crossed the line first but were always close. These guys do this all the time, when they're not on pilot cutters they are racing gaff rigged work boats, all very competitive and experienced. There were four races, two Saturday and one Sunday and of course the passage race from Fowey. We were amazed to find out we'd won that one, second in two and fourth in the last, fabulous results, Polly had definitely shown her mettle to the locals, we will be back!! On Monday we planned to leave for our run back to the Solent, unfortunately the wind was not favourable, we struggled to make headway, wind was weak and right on the nose, we did sail it but struggled to make distance!

As Reece had to be back for work we decided to dive into Plymouth, spend the night and drop him off, Jeremy also made a decision to abandon the passage, leave Polly on the pontoon at Mayflower and catch a train back. Was a shame to call it early but a sensible decision, wind wasn't changing any time soon and three more days was as bit much, we finished it there, Jeremy and Tom departed for Portsmouth and I spent the night on Celerity at Sutton Harbour. Was a fabulous trip great company, so many laughs, all great fun, and as for Fowey and St Mawes, just wow. Not forgetting Polly, a credit to Dave Cockwell and Jeremy, by far the most attractive pilot cutter out there, and such a beautiful boat to sail on. I for one, cannot wait for the next Polly adventure.



Passage race trophy



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