

The 2007 Overnight Cruise (Friday 10th August to Sunday 12th August)

In the early stages of planning this year's overnight cruise, it was established that there were some who could get away on the Friday and there were others who could not leave until Saturday. Luckily for me, I became part of the group that had to endure just one night under canvas!

The first two boats set off from Hill Head just after 08:00 on Friday 10th August. Steve O'Toole and Peter Bowden sailed their Wayfarer, sail no. 2906. Steve West and Tim Wadham crewed Steve's Wayfarer, 6990, ably assisted by Claire West with her recently acquired RYA Level 2 certificate. They made good progress until they were off Gurnard when the wind died. The light winds resulted in the cancellation of racing from Cowes on the ultimate day of Regatta week so there was far less "traffic" in the area than expected. Wayfarer 2906 carried an outboard motor. With Wayfarer 6990 in tow, the journey to the Scout campsite in the Newtown estuary was completed by about 11:00.

Shortly after arriving, and while there was still sufficient water to cross Shalfleet Lake in their tender, Clive and Nigel Dakin joined the group. Clive and Nigel had sailed from Hardway on Clive & Gill's Westerly Merlin, 'Kylara'. They anchored near the head of the estuary leading up to the campsite. From here they were able to view the arrival of the first two Wayfarers. Following a refreshing swim in the creek they pumped up the dinghy and went ashore to meet the campers.

At about 15:30 Sarah and Callum West arrived having crossed by ferry from Portsmouth to Fishbourne. The car was filled with tents, sleeping bags, gas and meths cookers, pots, pans and, of course, the Club's gazebo.

The afternoon was spent setting up the tents including Andy Cooks Palace! Tim and Sarah drew the short straws and won a visit to Sainsbury's in Newport to purchase provisions including the find of the weekend, Weetabix and Cider! No these were not mixed together, the cider was used to marinate Steve O'Tooles excellent pork steaks. Upon Steve's advice no-one consumed the Weetabix prior to donning a wetsuit! Therefore it is understood they were mixed with water and used to smooth the ground beneath the sleeping bags!

Following the onsite gourmet meal of Saturday evening the expedition to the New Inn at Shalfleet was undertaken. This used the new revised 'Field' route passing the nut and seed dispensers where frugal types could grab a snack to accompany their beer. After a pleasant evening in the beer garden the return route was approached. There is very little light pollution in this area so the woodland walk was interesting as was 'Boggy' bend. However there was just reward in the spotting of 14 glowworms. Steve West found some glowing wood and Clive and Nigel even found the water thrown up by their propeller on the return to Kylara glowed!

On Saturday morning at 08:40, four more dinghies set off from Hill Head. As there was no wind, Ali Austin took the lead in his Topper Omega fitted with a 3½ hp outboard motor. Ali's crew comprised his younger son, Harvey, and John O'Neill. Being towed by the Omega was Wayfarer 9153 carrying two "Mike B's" – Burlingham and Blake - with Tom Blake. Next in line was the Club Wayfarer, sail no. 3282, with Peter and Charlotte Cox [very brave to make the trip again after her experience last year – see report of first overnight cruise of 2006] and Alexander Austin. Bringing up the rear was Wayfarer 3802 (Frank Rappini's) helmed by Andy Cook and crewed by Lawrence O'Neill and Jamie Blake. After more than two hours of motoring, the wind at last picked up when the convoy was near Gurnard Ledge enabling them to sail the 4 miles to Newtown estuary. The final 200 metres in the shallows from Shalfleet Quay to Corf Camp were challenging with fickle winds and an ebbing tide. By 12:20 all the boats had been secured along the bank of Shalfleet Lake and the newly arrived crews were welcomed with liquid refreshments and a salad lunch.

The sunny afternoon was spent in a variety of ways. Some wandered off to the New Inn at Shalfleet for a "swift half". Others relaxed in the shade of the gazebo or in their tents. One of the cadets had to explain to his new-found friends that the noise they could hear was not a chain saw. It was his father snoring; tents are not efficient acoustic attenuators. Peter Bowden was pleasantly surprised to be visited by his wife, Julie with their son, Greg, and dog Farleigh.

That evening the campers were treated to a pasta-based dinner prepared under the direction of the chefs, Tim and Sarah, before setting off for the New Inn. Steve and Sarah stayed behind to allow Claire and Callum to get an early night after a full day. Those returning from the Inn chose a variety of routes and times but all encountered large numbers of glowworms. At about 22:30, after a cup of tea, Clive and Nigel set off in the pitch black across Shalfleet Lake to find their way back to 'Kylara'. It was another hour before the stragglers got back from the Inn. Silence returned at about 01:00 when they decided to go for a dip in Corf Lake.

Sunday morning began overcast. Brief, light showers ensured that the tents would be packed wet. A generous breakfast was prepared at a civilised hour, 09:00. The forenoon was spent cleaning up and packing as much as possible into the car. Sarah and Callum left just after midday to catch the 13:30 ferry from Fishbourne. Having set up a skipping rope to amuse the cadets, Tim was roundly defeated, 100 to 47, in his attempt to out-perform the youngsters.

Having reefed, the six dinghies set off from Corf Camp just after 14:00 to run out of Newtown River on the ebbing tide. The sea state in the west Solent was far worse than expected. A strong southwesterly (going) tidal stream encountering a strong (20 – 25kn) southwesterly wind was creating waves of 2 – 4m ie sea state 5 (rough). The boats were running with their booms out to starboard. To avoid sailing “by the lee”, they couldn’t safely point further east than the Beaulieu River entrance. Wind gusts and the waves frequently pushed the boats around to windward.

Ali, bringing up the rear in the Omega, was having an exceptionally rough ride. He brought the boat around to port onto a broad reach and sailed the two miles to land on the beach west of the old coastguard cottages. There, Ali and John took the sails down. They then rigged the outboard and set off to motor home.

As the Omega disappeared from view, Tim and Steve appeared to turn Wayfarer 6990 onto a reach to follow. In fact they had broached and, having great difficulty bailing out, had headed straight for the beach. Claire was lifted onto the shingle and wrapped to avoid wind-chill. Steve and Tim bailed out 6990, put Claire back aboard and set off. They completed the sail to Hill Head running on starboard tack.

The remaining four Wayfarers formed into pairs. Peter C in 3282 and Andy in 3802 pointed slightly higher than the other pair and made their manoeuvres ie onto starboard tack, just west of the Beaulieu entrance. Peter gybed 3282. Andy went about in 3802. Steve O in 2906 and Mike B in 9153 managed to reach the Beaulieu entrance before they turned. Having seen Mike take 4 attempts to go about, Steve and Pete B very gingerly, but successfully, gybed 2906. All four boats made the rest of the journey home on starboard tack some even daring to goose-wing. 3282, 3802 and 9153 headed up slightly to avoid shipping off Cowes. Mike B in 9153 had a particularly close encounter with a huge container ship turning off Cowes despite being fully conversant with the Restricted Area rules ie “. vessels over 150m have a moving prohibited zone 1km long and 200m wide ahead of them . . .”.

The first four dinghies reached Hill Head shortly after 16:00 to be met by “the First Lady” ie Joy, driving the tractor. The boats had just been hauled into the compound when Tim, Steve and Claire landed. Establishing that the Omega had not been seen for some time, HMCG were informed. They said that the Hamble rescue boat would be sent out to search. Shortly after, HMCG officers visited the clubhouse to get more detailed information. While they were chatting, the SAR helicopter, India Juliet, passed overhead, outbound. Within a minute or so, India Juliet reported sighting the Omega about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile out with its sails down and outboard motor running. Ali, John and Harvey landed safely just before 17:00.

For the third successive occasion, I have returned from Newtown to Hill Head in winds up to force 6. If I go next year, I’m taking my caravan – by ferry. Anyone want to borrow a Wayfarer?

Photographs of this weekend can be viewed in the Gallery.