

wavelength

csc magazine

Dick flies off
to see a
German
about a boat

Everyone's
a winner!
Awards from
the AGM

Mike's
Mississippi
adventure

The red flare
mystery

Cheers Trevor

we say 'goodbye old friend'





Wavelength
Marion
Tempest

Welcome to the latest edition of Wavelength. In this edition we say farewell to our old friend Trevor, we say hello to one of our new members Patrick and we have quite a bit about various awards!

It's the start of the season so please don't forget to take pics when you're out and about and send me photos, information or anything else you think would interest other members, to wavelengtheditor@channelsailingclub.org Have fun on the water. *Marion*

CHANNEL SAILING CLUB COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2019



Commodore
Dick Beddoe



Vice-commodore
Simon
Worthington



Company
secretary
Reece James



Treasurer and
racing
Simon Davey



Cruising
secretary
Bill Callaghan



Talks
organiser
Bill Rawle



Social events
co-ordinator
Bonnie Brown



Membership
secretary
Frank Gibson



Training
David Surman



RYA
Training
Ken Fifield



IT and web
Teresa
Hemingway



Bosun
Norman
Bowden

wavelength The Channel Sailing Club magazine

EDITORS
Marion Tempest
and
Simon Worthington

PLEASE SEND ANY LETTERS
AND PICTURES TO
wavelengtheditor@channelsailingclub.org

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
EMAILS
on a regular basis to remind
members of upcoming events.
Don't forget that if your personal
information changes you can
go into your personal account
on the website and update it on-
line. Check out the club's web-
site for news and information
www.channelsailingclub.org

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Hello and welcome

Commodore of the Channel Sailing Club, well here's a turn up for the books. When Jane and I joined the club five years ago. I never considered being part of the committee, let alone commodore. So I am greatly honoured to be voted in along with a host of new names to make up the 2019 CSC committee.

I've sailed boats of one sort or another since the age of eleven. From dinghies to small yachts onto charters in the Med and finally to the eye wateringly expensive business of owning a yacht from 2001.

Like many of you, we kept our yacht (Singapore Sling) in the Solent until a combination of wanting to sail further afield and horrendous mooring fees drove us to look for other cruising grounds. After a word with Tom Cunliffe on his first visit to the CSC we elected to go north. If you came to my talk last month you will know we cruised up the Swedish coast last summer and over wintered the yacht in North Germany. So sailing is very much part of my makeup.

Channel Sailing Club, how could you characterise it? I think its best characteristic is "friendly"! From my own experience, and from the comments of new members it is the warm reception and friendliness of the club that make it what it is.

Alick Fraser and his committee have done a superb job of developing the club. Finances were turned around, membership has risen and there is a renewed impetus on training. All in all Alick and team have not only achieved but exceeded their objectives.

So where does that leave us? The new team

now comprises new and existing members all of whom have personally contributed to this success. It is exciting to be in a position to push the club to new goals. For the next year, I would like our focus to be on training, membership and communications.

On training, we now have two committee members focused on both RYA and basic training. Training is why many new members join the club. But it does not have to be a full



blown course, it may be just chatting with a club member who knows the ropes. Equally, the club has always trained new sailors and we wish to promote the formal RYA courses, offered at very competitive prices. On the membership front, the RYA "Push

the Boat Out" initiative saw an increase in new members some of whom have become very active in the club. I would like to repeat it this year and prepare a reception to cater from the complete novices through to experienced sailors.

Finally, I would like to see our internet based technology increase through social media and the CSC website. We have an excellent fully functioning site that can be developed further. The committee has an abundance of skills both in web design and internet based marketing. It will be great to see those skills benefit the club over the next year.

Without question it will be a great year of racing, cruising and social events that promise to excite and entertain. So my parting comment is, if you are either an existing member or new member do become more involved, and if you just happen to be reading this in our brilliant magazine, do join our excellent club.



Larger than life!

Life-long friend Peter Thomas shares his thoughts on the passing of former CSC commodore Trevor Barker

On the 16th July 1941, whilst 36 Blenheims of Bomber Command were successful in sinking 17 German vessels amounting to 97,000 tons in Rotterdam docks, a certain Mrs Barker, in Stafford, was giving birth to a lovely little baby which she and her husband called Trevor John. Boy did that baby change!

Working life

He started his working career in TV production and then went to work for The Sun newspaper as a copy taker.

He later became London Regional Director of the Federation of Master Builders, where Martin and I first met

him. He organised many Technical Study Trips for them all over the world.

Later he worked in a carpet shop in Crystal Palace and went on to sell sheds and conservatories in Reigate.

He joined the RAC as a social member when Yvonne and he moved to the house in Baronshurst, Epsom, which was situated on the side of the course. They had a gate in their rear wall directly onto the golf course. He was not a golfing member, but enjoyed the 19th hole!

He loved going to England rugby matches with Martin and I at Twickenham and also the other 6 nations games (Paris, Rome, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Dublin)

Club commodore

Trevor was a member of our Club for over 25 years. Always prepared to offer an opinion, volunteer for a project, go off and research.

He became Commodore twice, the only person to do so. He put his heart and soul into the job and he was also awarded with Club Honorary Life Membership,

His greatest enjoyment, over which he would spend hours, was passage planning, which occasionally made sense and was sometimes correct. He organised many sailing trips, including the Spring Cruises, 4 day, Bastille, and of course the Icicle.

When he was Editor of

Wavelength, he won the prestigious RYA Best Club Magazine award.

Few regrets

His regrets were few, but include:

- Eating a dodgy pork pie on his first Easter Bunnies cross channel trip to Brittany in 1989.
- Not training his faithful dogs Bosun or Skipper to detect cancer.
- Not seeing the Liberal party in government by their own majority.
- And that no video evidence exists of his prowess in the bedroom.

I never heard him complain or moan during his illness and after fighting cancer for many

months, he is now pain-free and at peace.

Some friends will tell you he's in a better place, while some say he's in an urn, which will be lovingly kept by Yvonne as long as it matches the décor of the lounge.

Trevor would agree with Winston Churchill who said "I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter..."

A larger than life character, he also said that the various pubs, yacht clubs and restaurants can now dispose of their "banned for life files" as he is "not a problem anymore".

I just hope I can get hold

of Trevor's collection of porn before Yvonne finds it!

Whilst we are all sad at Trevor's passing, we should remember him as he was, when he was well, not when he was being a pain in the arse.

Finally, when Trevor was the Wavelength editor, he was banned from abridging articles against the author's...

Trevor John Barker, left the Channel Sailing Club on Sunday 6th January 2019. He leaves his second wife, Yvonne, two daughters Caroline and Sarah and two grandchildren Ethan and Emily Rose.

Trevor Barker
born July 16, 1941,
died January 6, 2019



High-five for Keith



Mystery over North Pole shift



This year's winners at the AGM

It was a bumper night for Change of Course skipper Keith Gibbs who clinched a handful of awards at the 2019 AGM in January. Keith, a veteran CSC member, won a total of five trophies, including the Genghis Khan't prize for the two-handed race, the Turner prize for the navigator's race, the Pursuit trophy and Le Harlequin award for the most improved handicap. Perhaps taking the gloss off his night, Keith was awarded the dreaded Cambrian Ball for the sailing blunder of the season, after a number of mishaps on the Passage race to Yarmouth.

A highlight of the night was the new Trevor Barker trophy, given for the best article in Wavelength in the past year. It was awarded to Lisa Phillimore for her musings on her Fastnet race debut. *Simon Worthington*

Other racing prizes

- White Knight** Wooden Spoon & Championship trophy
- Felix** Round the Island trophy
- Matambu** Regatta trophy.

Club awards

- Steve and Trish Morris** the Seamogs trophy for long distance sailing,
- Alick Fraser** the Jacqui Sillance trophy for best organised event,
- Reece James** the Mizzen trophy for most attendance at club events.
- Bonnie Brown** the Sally Jennings trophy for significant contribution to the club
- Frank Gibson** the Commodore's trophy for his contribution to running the club.
- Bill Rawle** the Miranda trophy for the best event on shore

Scientists have spotted something odd at the top of the world: the magnetic North Pole is drifting eastwards at an unexpectedly rapid rate.

As sailors know, compass needles point towards the magnetic North Pole, which moves unpredictably and is different from the geographic North Pole, which stays in the spot where all lines of longitude converge.

For hundreds of years the magnetic pole was to be found on the coast of northern Canada. In the 1990s it drifted into the Arctic Ocean and it is now moving towards Siberia at a rate of about 30 miles a year.

Where and why?

The British and American militaries fund the production of a map, the World Magnetic Model, that indicates where the pole should be at a certain time and which is now out by about 25 miles, although nobody knows why according to Ciaran Beggan, of the British Geological Survey (BGS).

Scientists from the BGS and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association intend to amend it early this year.

The World Magnetic Model helps to direct the compass tools found in smartphones. It is also by the military to steer submarines through Arctic waters and provides a back-up system to commercial flights, which rely primarily on GPS systems for navigation.

Dr Beggan said the faulty model would go unnoticed by most people outside the Arctic.

Compasses on smartphones used in mid or low latitudes are not especially accurate at the best of times and would be unaffected, he said.

Simon Worthington



Dick Beddoe was missing the London Boat Show so he flew off to...

Das Boot – Dusseldorf



We live in such extraordinary times. It is so easy to travel, and the norms for distances travelled in a day are changing. With the demise of the London Boat Show, January has lost one of the few highlights of this depressing month. In the past I always managed to get to the LBS, even when the show at Excel steadily declined year by year. So when the Dusseldorf Boat show “Das Boot” was advertised I thought to myself: “What would it cost to go to that show?”

8000 points later

Like many of us I have a pile of Avios points sitting there doing nothing, so I thought I would just check out the flight cost to Dusseldorf,

subsidised with points. Low and behold, a paltry £36 plus 8000 points. Pretty cheap eh! Then how much is the show? Just 11 Euros for an ancient person. What about parking at Heathrow? Ye gods!!! £34 for a day – disgraceful but what the hell. Let’s do it!

I pre-booked everything. Outbound at 7:10am from Heathrow T5, and back to Dusseldorf airport again for the 8:20pm return flight - home by 10pm. What a day. Just by coincidence Leon Barber (Shibumi) had an identical plan and we ended up travelling together.

Das Boot is the largest covered boat show in Europe. Seventeen halls are all filled to capacity with anything boat related. From motorboats to yachts to dinghies to surfing to scuba and all the associated paraphernalia that

support each sport. It is very impressive. The exhibition site is a short, free bus ride from the airport.

Ein grosse bierre, danke

Now I don’t speak a word of German apart from “Ein grosse bierre, danke”. A phrase that has been extremely useful in the past. But asking about the intricacies of an electric winch, for instance, would be impossible in German. So I was very pleased to see that all the direction boards, information displays and the like had an English translation. Not only that, everyone I spoke to (apart from the catering staff) spoke excellent English. It made the show

incredibly easy to navigate.

My primary purpose going there was to look at a particular Anderson winch (Danish) that I would like to buy. Online is fine, but for such an expensive purchase I wanted to see it “in the flesh”. This task was accomplished with ease. Beyond that anything else I discovered at the show would be a bonus, so when I strayed upon the Estonia stand – well this could be very useful.

Up the Baltic

Singapore Sling is going east this year across north Germany, Poland and up the Baltic States with a final destination of Tallinn. However, I know little or nothing about the country or

I like to think I saw the whole show, but in reality that would be impossible in a day

the city. So when I got talking to a guy on the stand who knew the area well, and even recommended a particular marina near Tallinn (where he keeps his own yacht) this gave me some confidence in our own plans. I also was given an excellent harbour/ marina guide and associated map. Clearly they are very keen to encourage foreign visitors. And it is cheap!!! I also purchased relevant charts for the area.

I would like to think I went through the whole

show, but in reality that would be nigh on impossible in a day. However I did do 14,500 steps (8 km) that day (according to my iPhone) so I reckon I saw quite a lot.

Our return flight was uneventful apart from the all the passport machines at T5 being “out of order” so huge queues had accumulated. (I was told that one of the disabled electric buggies had driven into the main computer and the machines had stopped working – what a surprise!).

Anyway, the day was a complete success with the timing working out perfectly and all objectives met plus a major bonus. I would thoroughly recommend the trip next year.



The sail to Cowes...



Pictures from
**The Icicle
Cruise 2018**



pontoon performances on a
New Orleans jazz theme...



then dinner in a new-this-year venue



Je suis un newbie!

Patrick Regnault discovers that he enjoys messing about in boats



I wasn't born drinking sea water from my bottle, I had partly grown up in a sea side village in upper Normandy, long before there was a marina there. My parents often left me with my grandparents. I had memories of roaming the resort, the cliffs... the main instruction was to come back for lunch as soon as the 12.00 noon siren wailed over town.

Watching the boats

I remember all I ever did was watching the details of the boats in the basin. Many with now not so exotic names from across the Channel of Holland. But I never got to set foot on any of these boats.

In the eighties, I had been lucky to count as my friends two couples, in my climbing group (mountains and rock climbing has been my lifelong passion from my student days in Paris) who were studying naval architecture, purely for the purpose of building their own boats. A third couple was already building their catamaran anyway on the river, just outside the industrial Docks of Boulogne sur Seine. The whole idea, in those heady days was to build a boat, drop out and b****r off...

But b****r off I didn't- I was never that brave. Instead, I joined the weird grown up world we called work.

I venture into the club

Years later, as climbing had become too strenuous, and on the strength of an exchange of emails with Frank Gibson, I simply pitched

up in Ashtead. It was the nearest RYA venue. I was offered a very generous welcome.

All told, I had sailed a few times on the French side of the Channel, Scotland and on the blackwater in Essex. I discovered I was happy on water. Goodness knows why.

I have crewed just once so far. On Dragonfly. Thank you to Trish and Ian for making Peter and I so obviously welcome in their domain.

By the time I had coiled the lines and secured the fenders, we were well out of Portsmouth harbour

I hope I did my bit onboard. By the time I had coiled the lines and secured the fenders, we were well out of Portsmouth harbour. A bumpy passage tacking, wind against tide, from Haslar Marina to Yarmouth. I enjoyed my turn at the wheel keeping to a course against the chop. Thank you also for demonstrating heaving to. On the way back, I could wrestle a tangled sheet out of a winch. I just hope I did it right. As ever on water, I loved every minute of it. For a short while afterwards on shore, it felt odd to go to the bathroom without having to pump.

I have just successfully completed the day skipper theory course and signed up for the competent crew week in March.

It looks my retirement is looking up. Sorry guys, ready or not, I'm staying. We'll grow old together.

CHANNEL SAILING CLUB, SAILING AND SOCIAL EVENTS CALENDAR 2019

This calendar is designed as guide only. Events may be subject to alteration. For full details of events and latest information see channelsailingclub.org

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
1 Bank hol	1	1	1	1	1 Regatta	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3 Talk Duncan W	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4 Briefing	4	4	4 Briefing
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6 Catch the tide	6	6 Bank hol	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7 Briefing	7 Wooden	7	7	7 Icicle rally
8	8	8	8	8 Briefing	8	8	8	8 Spoon	8	8	8
9	9	9 CC/DS course	9	9	9	9	9	9	9 Briefing	9	9
10	10	10	10 Briefing	10	10	10	10 West country	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11 Day Sail	11	11	11 cruise	11	11	11	11 Mulled wine
12	12	12	12	12	12 Briefing	12 Bastille cruise	12	12	12 Pursuit race	12	12
13	13 Talk Ken F	13 Talk Alick F	13 Long race	13	13	13 Race	13	13	13	13	13
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
15	15	15	15	15 Briefing	15 Passage races	15	15	15	15	15	15
16 Talk	16	16	16	16	16	16 Bastille cruise	16	16	16	16	16
17	17	17	17 Quiz night	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
18	18	18	18	18 Two handed	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
19	19	19	19 Good Fri	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19
20	20	20 Italian social	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
22	22	22 CC/DS course	22 Easter Mon	22 Briefing	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
23 CSC AGM	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23
24	24	24	24 Briefing	24 WhitSunday	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
25	25	25	25	25 Cruise	25	25	25	25 Briefing	25	25	25 Christmas
26	26	26	26	26	26 BBQ	26	26 Bank hol	26	26	26	26 Boxing Day
27	27 Talk Nigel B	27 Briefing	27 Navigators	27 Bank hol	27	27	27	27	27	27	27
28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28 Yarmouth	28	28	28
29		29	29	29 Briefing	29 Round the	29	29	29	29	29	29
30 Burns night		30 Frostbite	30	30	30 Island	30	30	30	30 School dinner	30	30
31		31 Rally		31		31	31		31		31

RYA Award for Nigel

Nigel's charity work with disabled sailors has won him an RYA award



Many congratulations to long standing CSC member Nigel Barraclough who has received a prestigious RYA volunteer award. He was among 57 people to be presented with awards from Princess Anne, president of the RYA, at a ceremony in London.

Nigel received his RYA Lifetime Commitment Award in recognition of his volunteer work at Littleton Phabsail dinghy sailing club, near Staines.

He has volunteered there for 20 years and has been providing vital support as its maintenance officer since 2013, looking after virtually all the club's equipment.

An experienced and capable sailor, Nigel enjoys taking disabled sailors out on the water and passing on his considerable nautical skill.

Having a great empathy with new or nervous sailors he patiently spends time encouraging and reassuring them until they gain confidence.

He has taken time off work to take Phabsail sailors on a wheelchair friendly catamaran

from Port Solent to the Isle of Wight to experience sailing on the sea.

Nigel, from Leatherhead, said: "Receiving the news about the award was a complete surprise, it was particularly special to receive it from Princess Anne and meet the other award winners, exchange stories and hear what they had achieved.

"I seem to recall her Royal Highness asked me if it felt like a lifetime but I was able to say that the time has gone quickly, and over the years I have met some wonderful people and had a lot of pleasure from Phabsail."

Alistair Dickson, RYA director of sport development, said: "The RYA Volunteer Award, sometimes known as the MBE of our sport, recognises the outstanding contributions made by volunteers nationwide.

"It has been a fantastic opportunity to say thank you to the people that go above and beyond, giving that little bit extra to ensure others can enjoy the sport we all love. Volunteers really are the lifeblood of boating and it's an honour to reward their efforts and give something back."

The British Port Association (BPA) is calling for the alcohol limit law for leisure boaters to be enforced and be in line with the one for commercial mariners.

Recently the BPA said it wanted new legislation to introduce alcohol limits for non-professional boaters – to be in line with the rules that already exist for commercial ships in British waters.

Richard Ballantyne, BPA chief executive, said: "It is right that we revive the debate around the gap in legislation regarding alcohol limits for non-professional mariners. We understand there will be technical challenges and also that enforcement will not be easy but it cannot be right in this day and age that such a sizeable section of our maritime sector is exempt from drink-drive rules.

"There have been too many occasions when alcohol has endangered lives in the maritime environment, both within and outside ports and harbours."

RYA position

The RYA promotes safe recreational boating, boaters should behave responsibly and understand that alcohol affects their safety and that of others. The RYA urges all boaters not to mix alcohol and boating.

The RYA opposes the implementation of section 80

What to do with a drunken sailor?

How does mixing alcohol and boating affect your safety and the safety of others?

of the Railways & Transport Safety Act 2003 for 'non-professional mariners'.

It creates confusion and the RYA considers it to be unenforceable.

The RYA would not object to legislation based on compelling evidence, provided that it was proportionate, understandable and enforceable.

Howard Pridding, RYA director of external affairs, said: "A significant aspect of our work is ensuring boaters are well equipped in knowledge and experience via training and national safety awareness initiatives. We believe that these are the foundations on which personal safety and responsibility are built. Put simply, alcohol distorts your perception of risk and your own abilities.

"Whilst we already urge boaters not to mix alcohol and boating, we would not object to legislation based on compelling evidence, provided that it was clear, understandable and enforceable."

Alcohol and boating law in the UK

Merchant Shipping Act 1995:

Boaters may be prosecuted under the Act if their actions on the water are seen to be endangering other vessels, structures or individuals and they are under the influence of alcohol.

Harbour byelaws:

Under which harbour authorities can prosecute if boaters are found to be under the influence of alcohol when in charge of a vessel.

Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003:

A law to introduce drink driving offences (including specific alcohol limits) for non-professional mariners was included in the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003. This provision has not been brought into force.

Next steps

The BPA and RYA have met informally and hope to have a constructive discussion with the Department for Transport and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. As these discussions continue, the RYA will keep members posted on developments via the current affairs hub at www.rya.org.uk/go/currentaffairs.

Simon Worthington

Getting the Delta blues

Mike Ralph's adventure on the Mississippi

Adrian Friend had moved to the USA and asked me if I would be prepared to move his boat Annie, from New Orleans to Houston. What an opportunity! All I needed was a helping hand and Pete Bryan when asked, took 10 seconds to make up his mind. We arrived at New Orleans airport, in April in 2001 having booked a return flight 3 weeks later.

The restoration of the boat, a 27 foot (circa 1935) wooden lake racing boat, weighing 5 tonnes, with a 39.5 feet tall mast should have been finished by the time we arrived, which of course it wasn't...

Missing keel

It was missing the steel-plate lifting keel and a lot of the cabin sole planking and obviously needed a paint job. Adrian told us that he now intended to put the boat on a low-loader and send it by road but we were quite welcome to stay at his house for a holiday. We had been looking forward

to the trip and so persuaded him that we could fix the boat, as Pete was a carpenter and I was a blacksmith!

The boat was in a boatyard on the North shore of Lake Pontchartrain and we worked on it daily for about a week, Peter fixed the cabin sole and other woodwork and I borrowed cutting gear and manufactured the lifting keel; luckily the owner had drawings for this.

We both set to, caulking painting and making her look tidy. The weather was lovely and the people in the boatyard very friendly and helpful; we even met a guy who had sailed and raced these boats and he told us that down-wind they could do 10 knots... exaggeration - we thought. The only thing we couldn't fix was the bracket for the 9 HP outboard motor, so the motor was going to have to stay in the water. More of this later...

Hardly a hotel!

Living conditions were very cramped with five-foot headroom, no mattress, wooden slats as a bed and the middle taken up with the housing for the keel which was actuated by simple block and pulley. Cooking facilities were limited

to a small portable two-burner stove with camping gas cartridges and the most basic cooking equipment, a handheld GPS, a pilot book and charts and several spare jerry cans for petrol. In case we were caught out at night time, we had a board with a green and red light and an extension lead!

Weset off

Eventually the mast was stepped, sails fitted and after a shopping expedition to provision the boat we set off across Lake Pontchartrain, heading for The Mississippi. She sailed beautifully off the wind but struggled along at about 3 knots under motor. Eventually we reached the industrial canal which connects Pontchartrain with The Mississippi. Our first real obstacle was a road bridge with a 40-foot clearance, which should give us 6 inches clear - luckily it did.

We entered a huge open lock, 1/4 of a mile long. A figure appeared waving both arms and shouting at us to turn around and get out of the lock. We then saw a huge barge, approaching the entrance. We got back just in time to squeeze out. It comprised of 6 barges (a 6-pack

- 2 abreast (this was the usual configuration of the barges) - pushed by a huge tug, it filled the entire lock.

The lock-keeper informed us by radio that we would have to wait as they were very busy with barge-traffic, most of which had dangerous cargo. After about 3 hours they informed us that the next barge had only 5 of its components and that there was room for us but we would have to be attached to the single barge.

Dangerous cargo

Under strict instructions we were given orders by the tug-skipper saying: "Stay with me until I tell you, but when I say F-OFF you F-OFF fast..."

This plan worked beautifully and we were set free in our tiny little lake racing boat into the huge Mississippi, with swirling water, logs and debris - luckily going in the same direction as us. After 6 or 7 miles in the Mississippi, we turned into the Intracoastal Waterway and started the long part of the trip. At the first lock into the canal we waited for a couple of hours before the lock keeper informed the next barge in the queue, which like most of them, had dangerous cargo, that they'd have to wait for "this little old sail boat Annie". We motored into the huge lock, feeling tiny, all on

We were set free in our tiny little lake racing boat into the huge Mississippi

our own. The gates closed, and several million gallons of water lifted us a few feet and we were again on our way.

The Southern Intracoastal Waterway (ICWW) runs from New Orleans to Galveston, close to the North Shore of Mexico bay. We spent most of the trip with wind mainly on the nose. Finding somewhere to stay overnight was often a problem. We could make 16 miles a day or so, or 20 if we could sail a little. The landscape consisted of marshland to port and starboard, sometimes with miles of mango groves or eucalyptus trees. The only life was around the oil and drilling facilities with small aluminium boats driven at great speed by huge fans on the back of them.

Fine dining

We had imagined getting to some sort of civilisation each night, dining on large steaks - not opening another tin of beans and sausages washed down with Budweiser - ugh... whilst hiding in a mango swamp, but it was quite an adventure and luckily too early for the mosquitoes to come to life.

There were quite a few

lifting bridges which on approach we had to radio the Bridge Master as the bridges were opened on request and we found that saying "Please would you raise the bridge for us" didn't seem to work and we ended up shouting "Pop the bridge for us Papa" like the tug skippers did.

There were stretches of canal in a dead straight line where you could see the horizon ahead of you and behind you all day long. The wind was, as always, mainly on the nose but when she was set free to sail she 'flew'.

We tied up one evening next to a huge shed where they were cutting and welding big steel pipes. It was dusk, and we were cooking our beans and sausages when a tug, minus its load, came down the canal - must have been doing 15 knots or more - making a huge bow-wave. We saw it coming; I was on the shore trying to arrange more fenders and hanging on to the boat. Pete was down below hanging on to the stove. We thought the boat was going to break-up, but it survived with a few scratches. On talking to the guys in the workshop they

informed us that these rogue tugs minus their barges broke all the laws about speed at night and that the Vietnamese fishermen in their little aluminium craft took pot-shots at them to slow them down.

We were caught out another evening at dusk. A tug and six pack appeared round a bend ahead of us and horror of horrors, another appeared overtaking it, filling the whole canal! They saw our little wobbling nav-lights and trained a huge ark-lamp on us. At about ¼ mile away they started shouting over the tannoi "What are you mother f...s doing down there?" followed by a stream of similar abuse. We hid in the reeds and when they went past - still shouting, they turned the ark-light round and continued to shout although they were going away from us - all very scary!

One afternoon the wind was on our quarter and with a full main, jib and the centre board up, we at last achieved the promised 10 knots. This we kept up for a couple of hours. Pete happened to spot that the transom had started to detach itself from the hull... There was a 20mm gap at the top caused by the engine being in the water at 10 knots for some considerable time. We tourniqued it back from a cleat on the transom to the jib winches. Late that afternoon there was a tug turning its complete six pack round in the

canal, completely blocking it.

This was obviously going to take some time, so we thought we'd sit in the mud and wait...! Bad decision, we were stuck...! It was getting towards dusk and there was a lock not far ahead, so we radioed the lockkeeper and asked if anybody could be of

Pete happened to spot that the transom had started to detach itself from the hull...

assistance. The tug skipper happened to hear us. He felt guilty for causing our delay. He parked his barges and came back to us. It was dark by now. He backed this huge mega-tug up to us and shouted: "I hope I don't pull you in half", so we threw him a very thin rope and he towed us off in one piece. People are great. We then radioed the lockkeeper again and asked where we could stay overnight, and he said, "Not here but there's an oil facility across the lake", which we were approaching. There was only one twisty channel through this lake.

Twists and turns

The lockkeeper got us on his radar and talked us through the twists and turns of the channel, got us to the other side in total darkness and we stayed overnight in this huge oil facility. Pete at this point wanted to leave the boat right

there, he'd had enough!

We radioed the Facilities Office to see if we could leave the boat there, but that was out of the question, so we set off again heading for Beaumont. Things were looking much more civilised as we approached Houston.

We had one night's stay at Orange where we moored on a private jetty at the bottom of a stranger's garden. The next morning the owner came down and asked why we hadn't knocked on her door, we could have had dinner with them. She then asked if we needed anything and we said petrol (as always) so she drove us to the gas-station with our cans - we were now feeling more positive about our adventure.

That evening we arrived at Beaumont Marina, very posh. They were not happy to have us but said the boat could stay there for a few days. (How the attitudes had changed since the swamps!)

We took a taxi to Houston where we stayed for a few days. Adrian phoned and said he'd been asked to move the boat out of the marina. We met him in Houston and moved 'Annie' to a less salubrious marina, just short of Galveston and that is where our story ends.

A few months later Hurricane Katrina devastated the area. Whether Annie survived, we know not - sadly...

ONE RED FLARE IS NOT ENOUGH

Who sent up that flare on the horizon..?

It was 10.30 pm, dark, with light winds 35 miles out from Portsmouth and a couple of miles south of the west going shipping lanes. Orcella was en route to Honfleur via Le Havre for the Bastille Day celebrations, with four crew. I was on watch with one other when we both saw a red flare rise and fall some distance away and well forward of the port beam.

We both saw a red flare rise and fall

Confirming we had both seen the flare, we changed course in that direction and I called up the other two crew from below to look out.

Mayday relay

I called Solent Coastguard on Channel 16, I said I was calling as a Mayday relay, on the basis the red flare was a call for help. I reported what we had seen and gave our position. I stressed that two crew had each seen the flare independently. I described it as being a bit dim but definitely red, visible for maybe 5 seconds and throughout its complete arc both up and down. We could not tell how

far away from us it was and gave them an approximate bearing. I said we were motoring in that direction and would conduct a search.

The search is on

We motored for about a mile while constantly looking out all around then stopped, listened, and started an expanding circular search pattern. We heard Solent CG put out a general information broadcast about our red flare sighting report. We continued to expand our search, using searchlights both sides.

Solent CG came back to us on VHF some while later and I explained what we were doing. They said they had had no corroboration from other sources and also that the Air Sea Rescue helicopter had been exercising in that area earlier - which we hadn't seen - and they thought we had seen its lights rising and falling. I explained that both I and my crew were all reasonably experienced sailors and knew what we had seen. I was adamant it was a flare. Definitely not a parachute flare, handheld flare or laser, but a flare, rising from the sea and falling back into it. I thought

it was most likely a pocket type pen flare so we were possibly looking for a person in the water, not a boat.

No corroboration

Solent CG then said that as they had not received any corroboration from other sources, they were satisfied there was not an emergency situation, they released us to proceed on our way. We heard them call off the Mayday on Channel 16. I called Solent CG back on VHF and said we were reluctantly ending our search. They thanked us for our help and wished us a safe voyage. We felt pretty sick about it.

I'm not sure what I had expected. I thought they would send a helicopter with night vision and infra red gear to conduct a search, but no. I was struck by the fact that without other corroboration - they kept using that word - our report alone was not enough for them to take action.

Lessons learned? Always be able to clip on. When in any doubt, clip on. At night, definitely clip on. And one flare is not enough....

Clive Hall



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