

## **EAST OF SELSY BILL**

JUNE 2007

After much discussion our decision was made to sail East on board Moonriver after the YOGAFF festival, with a plan to cross the English Channel from Dover to Dunkerque, then make our way up the French/Belgian coast to Vlissingen in the Netherlands and on into the Dutch canal waterways. Many days were then spent researching and planning our trip along with purchasing of necessary charts, pilots, documents etc. required, followed by several hours spent on navigation.

Arrived Yarmouth harbour Thursday 31 May, 16:00hrs to moor on the piles for the weekend festival. In the event, Helen had already moored her Y23 yacht, Hecate, so we rafted up together. 'Louisa' arrived on Friday, late afternoon with Steve, Alison, Gareth and Siobhan on board. We all met up and socialised for various events making it a very enjoyable weekend, in good company.

Sunday 3 May, on the 16:00hr bridge lift, we returned to our River Yar mooring, joined by Louisa. We spent a good evening together, then bade Steve and Alison farewell the next day as they sailed West for South Deep, Poole to meet up with Geoff and Jaye on Tarka.

Monday found us preparing for our passage, victualling, fuelling, re-checking tides, navigation and listening to weather reports, the latter was to be our main occupation over the next 6 weeks! After spending the evening on the floating pontoon in Yarmouth harbour, we slipped away on the early morning neap tide at 06:30hrs Tuesday 5 June. We had the waypoints on our chart plotter, set for passage straight to Brighton but due to increased North Easterly winds, F5, making beating under engine very unpleasant, plus a strong wind warning broadcast for N.E. Foreland to Selsey Bill, we set the stay sail on course for Horse Sand Fort and on to Chichester, where we spent a night in Sparkes Marina at the tip of the harbour entrance.

Wednesday 6 June we left Chichester on passage for Brighton, to arrive at the Looe Channel 5 hrs after HW Dover, as suggested in Tom Cunliffe's Shell Channel Pilot. In another North Easterly wind predicted F3/4, we were beating against the waves in quite rough seas. We do not have a wind speed indicator on board Moonriver but our thoughts were, that we were in a F5. On reaching Selsey Bill, we expected to squeeze Moonriver between Bouldnor & Street buoys to enter the Looe Channel but found them quite widely spaced and well marked. The next half hour we pitched and rolled, soaked and salty from head to toe! Another 6-10 nm, we began to see the Sussex coast clearly which gave added interest. Chatting and forgetting for a moment, the lobster beds off Worthing, we were shocked to suddenly notice a flag marker slipping past our stern dangerously close, realising we had just had a very lucky escape!

Soon, it seemed we were entering Brighton Marina, a calm haven after being buffeted around for 9 hours. The marina staff were very friendly and helpful finding us a quiet berth where we stayed for 2 nights to recover. On our last evening, we met another couple, Gerard and Maureen, on Valliente, 34' Sadler, who were also bound for the Netherlands. They joined us on Moonriver to exchange passage plans over a few glasses of red wine. We exchanged mobile numbers to keep in touch 'en route', the outcome of which I will relate later.

Friday 8 June, all prepared to set sail at 06:00hrs for Eastbourne, only to find on checking the weather with Marine Call, that there was a strong wind warning issued at

06:00hrs until 12:00hrs that day. After waiting around snoozing, reading for a few hours, at 10:30hrs weather seemed calmer, winds now F2/3, light North Westerly, we motor sailed for Beachy Head, tide only with us now for 2 hours. As we turned to head into the coast for Eastbourne, we lost our wind, so motored along to find the fairway buoy marking the entrance to Sovereign Harbour Marina. After entering the lock, a member of staff from the harbour office, (contact VHF Channel 17) gave us a berth on the visitors' moorings along with several other yachts from Netherlands, France and Germany. We spent a night with the friendly hum of a refrigeration unit on a large fishing boat moored nearby!

As we left Eastbourne the next day 9 June at 06:00hrs, it was now a light North Westerly with the sea state very smooth and the Sussex coastline shrouded in mist. We managed to sail for half an hour, very exciting, however the rest of our passage to Dover, was motoring except after passing Dungeness we were able to hoist the stay sail for about an hour. There were more seabirds on this part of the coast, gannets, shags, herring gulls, great black-backed gulls and two guillemots that seemed to be following us whilst diving underwater to feed. Our excitement for the day was when the HM Customs Patrol boat sped over to us from the Nuclear Power Station at Dungeness. She circled around us, obviously checking us out, then sped away causing us havoc with her wash as we were under sail. Shortly after, we passed the patrol launch for the Lydd firing range, whose crew gave us a friendly wave, or so we thought, more later.

Finally arrived at Dover 17:00hrs and called the Dover Harbour Office on VHF Channel 74, to request permission to enter the West harbour as explained in the Shell Channel Pilot. After gaining permission, we expected a patrol boat to guide us in and allocate a berth as mentioned in the aforesaid pilot but were disappointed on that score so had to feel our own way into harbour and on into Granville Marina after requesting a berth for two nights over VHF Channel 80. Granville is a 'dock in' marina where the lock gates open and close automatically when the tide changes, to keep the depth at 2.9 M.

Our plan was to cross the channel to Dunkerque on the first good weather report, so began setting the alarm for 05:00hrs each morning to hear the 05:20hrs Shipping Forecast report on Radio 4 FM. These two nights increased to five as we became fogbound in Dover along with many other yachts. To keep ourselves occupied we climbed up the hill to see Dover Castle, excellent visit incidentally, and explored the White Cliffs.

Still waking at 05:00hrs every morning hoping the weather would change, it did, when the fog lifted it was replaced by thunderstorms with winds F6/7 with strong wind warnings for the Dover Strait. These weather reports continued for another five days as there was a low over the Netherlands and gale force winds around the Scilly Isles. The long range weather forecast was as bad, so we began to wonder if we would ever cross the English Channel! We had a mobile message from the couple we met in Brighton on yacht Valliente, they had managed to cross to Calais before the weather broke but were then in Goes in the Netherlands, fed up as the weather was awful and could not come back, opposite problem!

To raise our spirits we had days out, visiting Canterbury by bus and Chatham Historic Docks by train/bus. We had now been in Dover for seven days, a pattern was established for evenings, after a meal, we checked tides, navigation for the following day, with hopes raised for a possible crossing. Awoke at 05:00hrs to hear the shipping forecast at 05:20hrs each morning, going back to sleep after yet another bad report! We were by then moving into Spring Tides and losing the length of daylight hours for

sailing the 43nm to Dunkerque and the weather reports were still predicting winds F6/7 in the English Channel and Dover Strait.

Sunday 17 June, it was Father's Day, so as we would not be able to see our daughters, I treated Tim to a few beers at the Cinque Port Yacht Club to sit and read the Sunday papers, it was a very warm and friendly place. Monday 18 June brought strong wind warnings again for the English Channel and inshore waters, so to keep depression at bay, we caught a bus to the medieval port of Sandwich, visiting Deal on the return trip. The long range weather forecast for the next five days in the English Channel is still bad, a decision will have to be made, can we wait any longer in Dover, it is already ten days too long!!

Tuesday 19 June, 05:30hrs, we sadly decided to abandon our passage plan to the Netherlands and take our chance with the inshore weather report before the next low came in.

We left Dover at 06:00hrs to make our way back to Eastbourne determined to discover the Kent and Sussex area 'en route' to our home port. As we passed Dungeness, we were accosted by a patrol boat coming alongside to inform us that we had just entered the army zone for Lydd firing range and to make all haste to sail 2nm South to clear the area. This we promptly did, phoning on channel 73 later to apologise. Oh dear, this could be a confession! This manouver changed our course slightly which enabled us to hoist the stay sail to help us along. The tide was with us with the wind on our stern, so we made good progress, surfing on top of the waves. As we passed Hastings, the tidal streams changed direction and the predicted Force 5 wind arrived. It was a very energetic sail from there until we reached Eastbourne where the sea swept us into the marine very fast! We plan to stay here a few days to explore and recuperate.

A few days stretched to seven due to the awful weather conditions and huge seas. By then we had thoroughly discovered Eastbourne and surrounding areas, very pleasant but not the Netherlands!

Wednesday 27 June, the early morning Shipping Forecast for inshore waters gave winds F3/4, possible F5 later. We decided to set sail for Brighton as that was a good weather report compared to the last week. Unfortunately, the F5 winds arrived early at 12:00hrs exactly and the sea became very, very rough. Moonriver was pitching and rolling, the sea was swamping us, so we decided to take refuge in Newhaven as quickly as possible. However, on phoning the harbour control on VHF Channel 12, to request permission to enter, we were told to wait 30 minutes for two large vessels to leave harbour. I asked if we could slip in between vessels and was told 'negative'.

After nearly losing me overboard as I returned to the cockpit (luckily I was attached by my harness) Tim turned the boat around as slowly as possible as we waited just off the breakwater, it was the longest half hour I can remember. Eventually, the Transmanche ferry reversed out of the harbour, bound for Dieppe and we were able to enter at last to find a vacant berth in the Newhaven Marina at 'Sleeper's Hole'.

After one failed attempt to moor in such high winds, by now I had already jumped off onto the pontoon, Tim reversed Moonriver away, I found another more sheltered mooring but on the second attempt after throwing me the bow rope to secure, Tim jumped off with the stern rope, slipped on the lichen covered pontoon and promptly fell into the water. His life jacket worked instantly and he was enclosed in bright yellow inflation, it all happened very quickly! Tim was hanging on to a pontoon cleat as I secured the boat whilst a guy from the adjacent yacht very kindly hauled him out, dripping but safe. We shall not forget our entrance to Newhaven for a good while.

This passage report is in danger of becoming a sad saga, sad but true.

We had planned to stay overnight in Newhaven and continue our passage to Brighton the next day but as before in Eastbourne, this time stretched to ten days because of the gale force winds and huge seas. During our stay we discovered Newhaven and surrounding places by train or bus, made friends on the marina and began to feel like locals, very scary! We did try to leave Newhaven, Tuesday 3 July but had to abandon the attempt as the seas were still too rough from all the strong winds of previous days. Four days later, Saturday 7 July brought a slight break in the weather so we took the opportunity to motor sail down the coast to Brighton. We were beating into the wind in fairly rough seas which was not very pleasant and three hours later we were very glad to see the breakwater for the entrance to Brighton Marina.

We ate in a restaurant on the boardwalk that evening but in the early hours were awakened by a woman calling 'George' loudly on the pontoon, then some splashing around our boat. On rushing out we found a woman in the water, her dog barking on the pontoon. Tim and I could not pull her out and her dog was yapping and nipping our legs, so Tim rushed off to fetch the harbourmaster while I stayed talking to the woman. They managed to hoist her out between them but the dog bit the harbourmaster on the leg! He then took over from us and later as we were settling down to sleep we realised the dog was called 'Freddie' so who was 'George?' From then on sleep was impossible as we kept worrying where George was!

Sunday, awoke at 05:00hrs and after listening to the Shipping Forecast decided to leave for Yarmouth at 08:00hrs after breakfasting and refuelling. The weather was lovely with smooth seas, we had a coffee, later on lunch and were thoroughly enjoying ourselves. Then 'you guessed' the winds increased along with the seas and soon we were rolling around getting thoroughly soaked. Thankfully we had steered course for the Outer Owers in case the weather changed, we passed the South Pullar Cardinal, then on past the Nab Tower and headed for the next waypoint, Horse Sand Fort. We were very tired and wet by then so took shelter in East Cowes Marina for the night and ate on board after showering away the salt layers.

The next morning Monday 9 July after sleeping late, we made for our home port of Yarmouth. It rained on us and we missed the 14:00hr bridge lift but this enabled us to have the first proper sail of the last six weeks. We tacked and sailed around for an hour or so, then made for Yarmouth harbour and the 16:00hr bridge lift to moor in our usual place on the river.

Sailing East of Selsey Bill gave us experience in very different weather and sea conditions, covering 360 nm, which has been character building! It was not our planned passage which was very disappointing but we visited many new places along the way and met some very interesting people. We still plan to visit the Netherlands, maybe in 2009.

#### ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTATION :

SSR Certificate of British Ships Registry (small ships)

VAT Receipts for proof of payment of VAT on purchase of boat

Boat Insurance

VHF Certificate & Licence

Plus :

RYA Certificates Day Skipper/Yacht Master

RYA International Certificate Competence to operate pleasure craft

#### ADDITIONAL FOR BELGIUM/NETHERLANDS

Schengen Plezierhavens “Belgie” – Two certificates for crew list obtainable from RYA – to be signed in Belgium & Netherlands

ANWB VVV Watersport Almanak 1 – Watertoerisme – Reglementen en vaartips (Regulation for all pleasure boats on Dutch inland waterways to have on board – Dutch language)

ANWB Wateralmanak Deel 2 gives time schedules for road bridges and locks, however ANWB produce a useful chart plus this info – Vaarkart Nederland with Openingstijden spoorbruggen (bridge & lock opening times) and Staande mastroute door Nederland (standing mast routes) available at Middelburg at NNieuwe Burg 40, 431 AH Tel: 018659900

RYA European waterways regulations can be useful

#### PILOT GUIDES

The Shell Channel Pilot – Tom Cunliffe

Cruising Guide to the Netherlands – Brian Navin

#### CHARTS

Imray – 2200 Series – The Solent

Stanfords No.9 – North Foreland to Selsey Bill

Imray No.C30 – Harwich to Hock van Holland & Dover Strait