

# A 'Boys Own' Adventure

**Father and son cruise around England and Wales**

**Sunday July 23rd to Saturday August 5th 2006**

Sitting at home on a dark winter's day, our 10 year old son Bryn and I were discussing missing being out on the RIB and what should we do in the coming year? For us the previous season of family ribbing was mainly cruising: the pleasures of arriving at different ports and harbours and the cruise planning involved.

So a plan was hatched for a 2 week trip around England and Wales. The aim was to travel from Berwick upon Tweed (by the Scottish border) clockwise right around to Carlisle (again close to the Scottish border). My wife Kathryn remained sceptical at this initial stage.

Why did we do it on our own? Why not travel in company with other RIBs? Well it made the challenge more personal and avoided the known factor that doubling the numbers involved quadruples the work!! We were also conscious that we could not pre book any accommodation until we arrived each day. With the trip falling in the busiest holiday period we knew that getting 2 beds on arrival should be achievable.

The initial planning resulted in two options:

- Launch at Berwick and recover at Silloth  
(Nearest slip to Carlisle)
- Launch at Calshot, recover at Silloth,  
re-launch at Berwick and recover at Calshot

The weather would be the decider.

We have a Humber Ocean Pro 6.3m, named *Marikh*. Additional boat preparations were minimal as the boat was already well equipped and well maintained. We needed to carry extra petrol (securely) and 2x20L jerry cans would need to be strapped to the side of the console, thus keeping the weight forward. Total fuel being 150L main + 50L reserve +40L jerry cans.

It was the planning that took the time – with availability of petrol from the water proving to be the most critical individual factor. Each leg was planned and created on the PC nav planner. This would give a series of waypoints linked together as daily routes. The route would only be downloaded days before we left as constant minor changes were made. Lists of B&B/hotels and backup paper chart coverage for the full journey were sourced. When I saw the pile of almanacs/charts and other support paperwork that developed, I knew we would surely test the console storage capacity.

Land support was gratefully received from Pete Branson, who would deliver and collect us and the boat/trailer using our Land Rover Discovery, and be available at short notice if we were to stop half way round! Kathryn had now also seen the level of interest in the trip on the RibNet forum. She kindly offered to post each day a summary of what had happened, where we had got to and the possible itinerary for the following day. Kathryn would also learn to view the Atlantic pressure charts and feed this and other forecast information to us.

The summer saw Bryn turn 11 years of age. The weather had been exemplary the two weeks prior to the trip; fantastic – high pressure with no wind – had we missed the weather window? No it still looked good for a Berwick upon Tweed launch.

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### **Day 1, Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July**

5am leave Northamptonshire bound Berwick, ETA 13.00. A good clean run north saw us ready and waiting by the slipway at 12 noon, waiting, that is, for the incoming tide to give some depth of water. We launched and said our good byes – wind SW 2-3, beautifully sunny. This was it, Bryn and I looked out to sea – called up leg 1 on the plotter and knew there was no turning back. It took a few miles to fully appreciate the enormity of what we doing, but as we passed Lindisfarne on Holy Island and then the Longstone lighthouse we got into our stride. We were aiming to run at 24 knots as this has proved, for our boat/engine, to be the right speed/economy balance. Blyth was to be the first stop - but progress was good and this was revised to become Sunderland marina. No petrol here but BP garage (we knew) was 200m away. 65Nm covered today, we refuelled and then found a small hotel and went over the next day's leg, Sunderland to River Humber.

### **Day 2, Monday 24<sup>th</sup> July**

Another clear sunny day – suntan cream would run-out if we continued at this usage! Weather calm and sunny! A good straight-line run to Flamborough Head past Middlesbrough and Whitby. Puffins galore were seen on this section. Then on to Spurn Head and the River Humber. Interestingly, we found the buoyage

located differently to the chart plotter – shifting banks means occasional re-positioning of the buoys. The only petrol would be at Hull Marina – but that is 20Nm up river. The marina here is British Waterways run; we waited 2 hours to lock-in, very helpful and fuel at normal pump prices – well done BW. 129Nm today. Only problem today was the neutral inhibitor switch slightly out of adjustment (new control cables still bedding in). In such absolutely flat calm seas it was hard to pick up the boat's bow, even when trimmed right up. Weight distribution and full fuel load influencing this. Ibis hotel at 400m and a trip to the cinema to watch 'Pirates of the Caribbean' followed by a good meal and bed.

### **Day 3, Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> July**

We wanted to be out from the marina at the earliest lock opening. We were up at 04.30 and on the river at 05.30. No wind but thick mist. As we proceeded down river our speed reduced as visibility got worse. Lots of big ships around Grimsby – eyes on stalks. Clearing the river the plan was a 10 mile east leg then a long straight line to the coast just north of Great Yarmouth. Fog set in, thick, thick fog. It was damp and cold. Bryn wanted more sleep (as he did every day!) so I wrapped him in the console cover and he slept on top of our kit bags. We had 5 hours of fog. I found the lowest speed that would keep Marikh on the plane (about 16 knots) and it was just a case of staring into the murk hour after hour. Eventually in late morning the sun could be seen above and the fog slowly cleared. We passed Great Yarmouth and approached Lowestoft. It was still only lunchtime. We stopped on a completely flat sea, had lunch and reviewed the plan – we could see that we could make Levington in Suffolk, just up the River Orwell. We added 60L into the main tank and had a beautiful sunny cruise down past Southwold and on to Felixstowe. B&B was secured in Levington village, then a pub meal at 'The Ship' sat outside in the late evening sun. Figures for today: 170Nm, max distance offshore was 27Nm.

Now what was interesting on shore was that the interest in our trip was growing by the day as the daily updates on the RibNet forum were being viewed by more and more fellow ribsters (and school friends of Bryn's). I used the mobile phone to keep Kathryn and Pete updated, and one or other of them would post an update. Best wishes and invitations to stop off en-route were plentiful and much appreciated.

### **Day 4, Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July**

Weather sunny and the sea calm. Today should see us make the passage across the Thames Estuary; Ramsgate was the planned stop. We kept out clear of the numerous sandbanks, turning south and running between Long Sand and the Kentish Knock banks. Flat calm all the way. We were off North Foreland by midday – but visibility had reduced quite quickly. Ships appeared from the gloom. A call to MarineCall established that the weather was clear further around the headland near Dover. The day could be stretched, with Eastbourne as the

destination. Sovereign Harbour is new and very well equipped – requiring to be locked in. This new facility certainly adds a welcome additional port on this section of coast. We had learnt that the first thing to arrange on arrival was getting the tanks refilled so the boat was always ready. Kathryn came down for the evening and the three of us explored Eastbourne. 112Nm today.

### **Day 5, Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> July**

Again, a hot, sunny and calm day. Split lips and burnt hands and faces were becoming a problem! Gloves and helmets were worn simply to keep the sun off. A late start from Eastbourne and a passage to Yarmouth (Isle of Wight). Famous sites were passed including Beachy Head, Selsey Bill and into the eastern approaches of the Solent. 70Nm today. We fuelled up, moored up and then struggled to find accommodation! A taxi ride to Freshwater bay got that sorted and then a late evening's walk up Tennyson Down to view the Western Solent in all its glory.

### **Day 6, Friday 28<sup>th</sup> July**

Departed Yarmouth bound for Salcombe. Good run to Portland with steadily rising SW wind. From here the sea changed as the wind progressively roughened up our smooth ocean. During the pounding that was occurring there was a power feed problem to the plotter and it kept switching on and off. We arrived at Salcombe, fuelled from the barge and got a visitors' mooring at the far end of 'The Bag'. I sorted out the chart plotter power supply but the chart itself still appeared un-viewable. I entered in 3 key waypoints into my back-up GPS for the following day. I got a note from Kathryn to say that Louise (RibLines editor) and her partner Richard had literally missed us by minutes at Start Point – thanks for watching out for us. We stayed with friends in their rented holiday apartment; we had a superb evening before finally getting some sleep on the lounge floor.

### **Day 7, Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July**

We woke to blustery winds and grey skies (SW 5). We wanted to be off early and the harbour master personally delivered us back to *Marikh* as the water taxi would not start for another hour. The plan was to make Falmouth. Out of the river, across the bar, and then it became apparent that it may not be possible to go that far, so we had a discussion and agreed that Plymouth it would be. The visibility dropped, the rain set in and it was not pleasant. Finding the eastern entrance to the breakwater itself really proved quite challenging with no plotter. We arrived and fuelled and could only find a room at the Holiday Inn on the Hoe (twice the budget!). From here we should have been able to see out to sea, but all we got was the rain lashing the windows and literally no visibility. We had got there late morning and went in search of a cinema for 'Stormbreaker'. The evening allowed me to review the proposed next few legs and again get the forecast. It wasn't good: SW 5 locally 6 for the next few days!

### **Day 8, Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July**

Depart Plymouth for Falmouth and if going well could we make Penzance? The visibility was better with some good sunshine, however, the wind was strong with moderate seas. 11am we had arrived in Falmouth, topped up the petrol and bought pasties for lunch. The forecast implied the wind would strengthen and sea conditions would further roughen during the afternoon. We got straight off now in territory we knew (we had spent a week cruising on the Helford river last year). The plotter was giving Lat and Long only, still no chart, so I would work with that, and paper charts. Around the Manacles rock and on down to the Lizard. Despite giving a wide berth we had some of the largest seas I have encountered; huge ugly breaking waves, so big that turning the boat around was deemed too dangerous in itself. We ran at 8 to 10 knots into the huge head seas. Once around the lizard the seas quickly reduced to only moderately rough and we ran across Mounts Bay, through a heavy rain shower, past St Michael's mount and on into Penzance. The inner harbour is locked – and we had arrived at low water. We got the hotel sorted and then reviewed fuel. We had only used 38L since Falmouth, but for the next leg, around Lands End and on to Padstow, we wanted full tanks. A RIB enthusiast on holiday ran us down to Tesco – thank you sir. We locked in early evening.

### **Day 9, Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July**

Depart Penzance and return to Penzance. SW 5. 45 minutes in the bay was all it took to realise that today would be spent in Penzance, as it was cold, raining and not right for Lands End. We went and saw 'Stormbreaker' for the second time!

### **Day 10, Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> August**

We didn't even try today with the forecast as it was. We took the bus to St Ives and enjoyed some pleasant time on the beach. The good news was that the forecast was for winds to subside overnight to W 4, then veering NW. Given this and the need to arrive at Padstow at high water (to lock in) we left the boat in the outer harbour outside a large trawler. The slight irony was the showing that night on BBC2 of a documentary about the Penlee Lifeboat disaster – so I went to sleep on this – the night before rounding Lands End!

### **Day 11, Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August**

04.30 start, but lost some time recovering one of the kit bags from the sea and changing Bryn's wet socks! I knocked the bag off the steps with the bow of the boat while approaching to pick up Bryn. My excuse was it was dark! Navigation-wise I had the full printed list of waypoints for every leg. So I reviewed important ones and found that the route I had planned was perhaps too close to shore, given the moderate (although reducing) seas, and no chart plotter. A better plan was to run west until I arrived at Long 5 deg 50'W and then turn north. It probably added 5Nm but was more reassuring. Dawn had broken as we rounded the Longships and it was a fine sight. Keeping it central in the camera viewfinder

wasn't easy. We bumped from wave to wave; all too often it seemed that the boat would just twist to port as she came out of the water and then a less than comfortable landing on the port chine. Once around Lands End, the run up to Padstow was straightforward. The only thing that amazed us was how few other boats we saw. I had marked Padstow down as a potentially difficult stop. It was the only sensible port on this coast so would be popular but it had no petrol and accommodation in July/August at no notice wasn't going to be easy. What I can say is that the harbour master and his team (having learnt we had come from Berwick upon Tweed) were very helpful indeed, even taking the jerry cans twice by van to the local garage. Thanks guys.

### **Day 12, Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> August**

The wind had veered further and was now N4-5. We were now behind schedule by 4 legs with only two days left. Today we set off 10.30 for Milford Haven. We got over a rough entrance bar and then suddenly on the port side a huge shark's dorsal fin, literally 3 metres away. I shouted to Bryn 'Shark'. In hindsight, this was a mistake as Bryn was unable, in his mind, to separate Great Whites from Basking and was upset thereafter! Aware of the forecast, we agreed we would get into 50m depth of water clear of Pentire Head and see what conditions were like. The wind and seas were straight on the nose so, with disappointment, we headed back in. We gave temporary assistance to a Dart 16 whose rigging had given way, mast and all, and was drifting slowly out to sea. We liaised via the harbour master to learn that a Mayday had already been received and the inshore lifeboat was on its way. We left the professionals to it and got back in the harbour before the lock closed. The problem we were finding with these abortive days is that when we left we checked out of our accommodation and on returning would find it fully booked! The forecast for Friday was NW4 dropping to 3 later.

### **Day 13, Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August**

We had to go today – after all we couldn't ask Pete to come down to Padstow to pick us up! At this stage we had only completed two sides of the triangle! The day started with slight seas, reducing as we made the South Wales coastline. When 10 miles off, the wind was down to a Force 2. It was still only lunchtime. Standing on the jockey seats to get a better mobile signal, I rang Marinecall for a detailed forecast for Cardigan Bay: Variable 1 was ideal. While conditions were fine, we transferred 80 litres to the main tank and then knew we could make Pwllheli in North Wales. St David's Head was magic: the seas had reduced to a slight swell, the sun was out and the day couldn't have been better. On up past Skokholm Island and Skomer Island then on past South Bishop Lighthouse, we set a course directly across Cardigan Bay. We had dolphins, a pack of 10-12, jumping and diving with us. The only boat we saw was the fast ferry en route to Ireland. I continually monitored fuel usage and realised we could use more and run faster, so we increased to 32 knots for the last 2 hours. As we approached

the Llyn peninsula, the skies darkened and the drizzle set in. We arrived at 19.00. Total day's mileage was 170Nm. We rang Pete who, beyond the call of duty, drove up through the night (thus avoiding the holiday traffic) to arrive for breakfast at the Crown Hotel. That was it! Our available time had been used up - just a slow journey back down the M6 to look forward to.

### **Summary**

Thanks to Kathryn and Pete.

We had hoped to get to Northern Cumbria; one more day of good weather would have had us completing the missing 140Nm.

Total distance 955Nm (87% of target).

Fuel consumption was 1.13L/Nm (Suzuki DF115), 1081Litres. Average speed 18Kts.

Chart plotter update: the power supply problem had damaged the chart chip installed. Fitting a different chip showed it to be working fine once again. Only I didn't try that!

Bryn and I had a fantastic trip – thanks to all for your interest in it.

*Paul Beawain*

**Marikh**