

NEW 15 SPRINT

The Official Magazine of the
UK Sprint 15 Association
Winter 2021

The Great Glen

We sail a Dart 15 all the way across
Thomas Telford's stunning
Highlands waterway



Raiding the borders

Two 15s head up the East coast

Journey to the end of the World

Stewartby regulars discover the South-West

**PLUS: Nationals and Summer TT reports -
the Undercover Investigator - Windsport tips and more!**



Comments from the Editor

Whilst preparing for the recent Shanklin SC AGM, I realised that we had managed to complete almost twice as many races this year in our sailing calendar than we had managed to do through the whole of 2020 when lockdowns crippled clubs across the country. We are quietly getting back to normal which is a very good thing: reacquainting ourselves with friends in the boat park and resuming familiar rivalries on the race course. And instead of flying off to exotic shores abroad, many of us have instead taken our boat on holiday and gone exploring around our own beautiful isles.

The articles in this latest edition demonstrate the fun that can be had the length and breadth of Britain armed only with a Dart 15 and a PFD (ok - and a JetBoil - I can't rate it high enough and if you're taking your caffeine-addicted other half on an outdoor adventure I'd highly recommend packing one). Jenny & Nigel (and jetBoil alternative Dave) have extended their range beyond the Blackwater and out to the Suffolk coast and inland waterways; Mark Patten has conquered the M5 to spend a glorious week on the Fal estuary, and Liam & I did a 1,000 mile detour on route home from Draycote Water. There is not much that our boat can't do.

As usual, huge thanks to all of this edition's contributors and I hope you enjoy the read as much as I have enjoyed putting it together. Please share your sailing photos and stories - we love to receive them!

See you soon on the water or in the boat park,

Yvonne (aka Sootica 1965)



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Front cover: Biscuit and the Corran ferry. Photo by Liam Thom
Page 2 inset: Yvonne Pike on a canal up north.. Photo by Liam Thom
Page 3 inset: Ed Tuite-Dalton winning at Stewartby. Photo by Matthew Pedlow

Your Chairman writes...

We have just come to the end of a very successful summer sailing programme with both Nationals and five TTs, thanks to the hard work of Jenny Ball, our Events Secretary. All the events were well attended and there is definitely an appetite for these Traveller Trophy races. It is great to see sailors of all standards and ages competing at them and having a good time both on and off the water. Congratulations to Jenny for winning the Summer Series this year and for attending all five events.

We returned to Weymouth SC for our Nationals in June, which sadly I had to miss due to injury. Forty boats raced in a variety of conditions, giving everyone the opportunity to perform well over the weekend. Mark Aldridge (Grafham) had a stellar day on the Sunday in the strong conditions and went on to become our National Champion this year, ten years after he just missed winning at Pwllheli in 2011. Congratulations Mark!

In early September we returned to Yaverland SC for the Sports Nationals and were made very welcome by the club. The conditions were lighter than in previous years, but the racing was as competitive as ever and Instow (NDYC) had travelled in force with thirteen boats. In the end it all came down to the last race, with Sean McKenna (Shanklin) triumphant and Angus Cook (NDYC) and Hector Bunclark (NDYC) both snapping at his heels.

It has been good to see a number of our younger sailors competing with us, all with a lot of potential. Sophia McKenna (Shanklin) helmed at the Nationals, with her dad as crew to secure 11th place and take the Youth Trophy.

Jason Clarke (Marconi) has been steadily moving up the rankings, performing very well, leading several races and finishing in the top ten in the three summer TT events he entered. He won the Most Improved trophy at the Nationals.

Jemma Clarke (Marconi), Jason's sister, also sailed well throughout the

summer, receiving the Most Persistent trophy at the Nationals for completing all nine races - a great example to us all, when not all competitors wanted to venture out!

Abbie Clarke sailed at two TTs this year - her home club Stone and at Grafham, where she won the Youth Trophy. Very well done to her!

We also saw young Johnny Ball (Jenny's nephew) crew for his dad, David Ball, in some quite challenging and chilly conditions at Carsington. He seemed to love the occasion, especially sleeping in the camper-van and hopefully we will see him at future events.

Having had to cancel our Winter series last year, it is good to be able to look forward to a full programme of five TTs, with most being the usual one-day format.

Next year's RYA Dinghy Show will be at Farnborough on February 26th and 27th. We have booked a stand there, opposite the Dart 18s stand and with Windsport who will also provide a Sprint 15 boat for our stand. We are always looking for volunteers to help set up, be on the stand or help take down the stand at the end of the show, so if you would like to help out with any part of this, please do get in touch with me. We will have a number of free Exhibitors passes for this. My contact details are on Page 2 (opposite).

Next year's Nationals will be held for the first time at Mylor, near Falmouth, which is the "home" of the Sprint 15 and Dart 18. The event is being hosted by Windsport and supported by Restronguet Sailing Club on the Fal estuary. It is a fabulous place to sail and a beautiful part of Cornwall with lots to explore in the local area. It is promising to



be a great event and will be very popular. Do come down for a week if you can! We will also be arranging other activities for the week after the Championship, both on and off the water.

Windsport have a number of camping and motorhome spaces which they have reserved for our event (first come first served so please book soon!).

Thank you to everyone who has transferred their membership payment to our new NatWest bank account. There are still a number of members who have continued to pay into the old Santander account which makes it more difficult for us to administer. We are extremely keen to get everyone paying into the NatWest account, so we would ask everyone to pay their membership due on January 1st 2022 into this account. If you should end up over-paying, Nigel our treasurer will arrange a refund!

I am planning to be at most of the winter TTs, so I will hopefully see some of you there.

Wishing you a happy and relaxing Christmas.

Ed

Raiding the borders...

Some of you may have followed the travels of Fleet Commodore Nigel and I in our Sprint 15s last year – which took us the length and breadth of the River Blackwater, as well as longer voyages up the Colne to Colchester and round to Burnham on the River Crouch.

This year, we wanted to extend our range further afield and developed a fairly extensive wish list which included the River Stour, River Orwell and the Walton Backwaters. All to be found around the Essex and Suffolk Border and – like our own river – all very beautiful and with a long

heritage of being worked by the Thames Sailing Barges, some of whom still call the area home.

Until now, we have referred to our trips as cruises or voyages. But we recently discovered that the F18s made a similar trip which they referred to as a “Raid”. This is clearly much more exciting so hereafter, we will be raiding instead of cruising too.

The first challenge was to talk Fleet Commodore Nigel out of his original thinking that we could sail the 30 miles from Marconi to the entrance of the Orwell/Stour/Backwaters (delete as appropriate), complete a full

navigation of the chosen river and then sail the 30 miles back all in one day. And presumably undertake that three times. Actually, it was not that difficult since I flat out refused to even entertain the idea.

Instead, approaches were made to Andy Webb, a sailing colleague at Harwich Town SC who kindly agreed to let us keep our boats in their compound for a week – thereby providing a perfect base from which to explore all three rivers, without the 60-mile round trip from Marconi each day.

Harwich Town SC hosted the Sprint 15 Nationals in 2019 so we know them well and many of them have connections with Marconi through the East Coast Piers Race or even being the sister of our Vice Commodore! They are a friendly and welcoming group and we are very grateful to them. Harwich Old Town is also a fantastic place to spend a few days. It is steeped in maritime history, surrounded by rivers, has a pier, four lightships and four lighthouses (which is the most impressive strike rate of anywhere I have been) and is home to Trinity House operations. It is made up of quaint streets and historic houses and literally has a pub on every street corner. And Dovercourt beach is a lovely stretch of award-winning sand.

We planned our visit for the week before the August Bank Holiday, booked accommodation in the Alma Pub and Samuel Pepys Pub, contacted the Harwich Harbour Authority for their excellent yachting guide and tide-tables, consulted East Coast Rivers pilot book in detail (well, Jenny did), and hoped for good weather...

Photo: Manningtree from the River Stour, taken by Jenny Ball



...Sprint 15-style

By Jenny Ball (aka Catbert Too)



Our original plan for Day One was to sail from Marconi to Harwich, expecting the usual South Westerlies to make it a straight line sail. However, the wind went round to the north the day before we went and steadfastly stayed there. So we adapted and drove the boats double-stacked on the trailer on Monday morning. We unloaded the boats with the help of two unsuspecting passers-by and got rigged and ready to go.

Nigel's van and trailer provided a great clubhouse for us during the week. We had no support boat with us – so made sure we each carried a VHF, a horn, a paddle, tow rope, various spares, tape to temporarily fix anything structural, a manual compass, food, water and spare clothing. We used a navigation app (Navionics) and the Ordnance Survey App to guide us as well as small laminated “chartlets” as back-up. We used the RYA SafeTRX app to share our planned route with an emergency contact (Pit Crew Dave) which also provides a

location tracker in the event someone needs to come and find you. We consulted several forecasts as well as timing our raids with the tides to maximise the potential of getting to our destination and back again safely. We had no intention of capsizing – particularly as the sailing waters are quite busy with river traffic, let alone the ferries and container ships over on the Felixstowe side of the channel.

Having rigged the boats on Day One, we lost no time to head out and bag our first Raid. The River Stour runs East/West so the Force 3 – 4 Northerly winds presented a perfect opportunity for straight line sailing there and back with the tide under us both ways. At this point, Nigel realised that the A3 Ordnance Survey maps from 1980 (the Orwell Bridge was not even on them!) that he had laminated were probably not that practical to use on a Sprint 15 at any time, let alone hurtling along at a rate of knots with the mainsheet in one

hand, the tiller in the other and hiked out with lots of spray. Turns out the designers of the Sprint 15 completely omitted to fit a chart table as standard.

We set off from the lovely sandy beach, turned left to round the point and then left again past Ha'Penny Pier and Parkston to enter the Stour. I am very fond of the River Stour from various walks along its north and south banks and have wanted to sail it for a long time. When the tide is in, it is a wide expanse of water with a mix of trees and fields along both banks. It is very shallow however at low tide, so we were definitely seeing the river at its best. We had the perfect breeze and quickly left Harwich and Parkstone behind and reached past Wrabness on the south bank. A charming collection of moorings, boats and houses nestled along the river front with the river-bank rising steeply behind them.



Over on the north bank, the river opened out into Holbrook Bay overlooked by the impressive buildings of the Royal Hospital School – (a number of our Marconi members are alumni of the school). Back over on the south shore, we rapidly reached Mistley - famous for its Thames Barge connections - its towers now bereft of their church and “that fence” put up along the quay in more recent times. The channel does some serious zig zagging from Mistley on the south bank, right across to the north shore and then back on itself again to the town of Manningtree. We were there at the top of the tide and in boats that only draw about 2 feet but Jenny, ever the purist, dutifully followed all the channel markers and, completely out of character, so did Nigel.

From the moorings off Manningtree, it is only a short stretch inland before the navigation ends at the Cattawade railway bridge. I have been over this bridge many times for work in a former life. If you happen to take the train to Ipswich or Norwich, make sure you are awake for the stretch just after Manningtree station - it is beautiful. But it's even better if you are on the river itself. Having got as far as we could, we turned back and retraced our steps all the way back out of the Stour.

The wind had increased slightly and shifted further north so it was a tight fetch but still a straight line sail all the way back and with plenty of hiking and spray to go with it. We passed SB Victor coming up river – a splendid sight with full canvas although I did notice they were not hiking very much. As we neared the mouth of the river, the water became much more turbulent as the ebb tide from the Orwell and the Stour rolled over each other and out past Felixstowe and Harwich to the sea. So the final stretch past Ha’Penny Pier round into the main channel was quite challenging and we were relieved to see it flatten out in the final run in to the beach at the sailing club. We had completed 19.3 NM in 2 hours and with a max speed of 16 knots – which constitutes a good day on the water by any standards.

Having battled our boats through the sand and into the compound (there is something to be said for concrete hards) – we walked across to Ha’Penny Pier and sat in the sunshine with a coffee and watched the comings and goings of yachts into and out of Shotley Marina, the Stour and the Orwell. Having checked in to our respective accommodation, we had a great evening meal in the Alma and made plans for our trip up the Orwell the following day.

Day 2 dawned with a forecast of similar Force 4 + breezes but more from the north – and a plan to sail up the Orwell as far as you can get before the river disappears under a road near Ipswich town centre. The Orwell is another river I have visited many times by land and have walked much of its banks. Definitely another river on the bucket list and, of course, the opportunity to sail under the mighty Orwell Bridge.

We set off with plenty of time before high water to maximise our chances of getting to the far end. The Orwell is a busy river so we took care to sail along the east edge of the main channel to keep away from the yachts and occasional gin palace. We were the only cats up the river and we definitely stood out!

Having negotiated our way past the containers at Felixstowe, which cast huge wind shadows, we got into better breeze and quickly passed Suffolk Yacht Harbour at Levington on the east bank. We originally thought we would be beating up the river and straight line sailing back – but the wind was very shifty as it blew down the steep river banks on the eastern side and we were doing anything from fetching to broad reaching and back again.

We passed the famous Pin Mill and neared Woolverstone where Royal Harwich YC were hosting a racing week for young sailors. Andy Webb from Harwich Town was on one of the RIBs as his son was taking part in the regatta (both former Sprint 15 sailors, I might add) – so we sought him out to say hello and thank you. Andy and his RIB crew had the thankless task of trying to lay the windward mark when the wind was shifting about 60 degrees every minute and as it was hard enough just trying to sail in a straight line - we were very sympathetic.

We reached the Orwell Bridge - which you can't exactly miss as it is huge - and it must have been a big shock to the landscape when it was first built. As is always the way when you just need to sail a straight line between the piers of a bridge, the wind started to be circular. But there was more room under this bridge than most so we were able to get through without crashing, despite being very pre-occupied trying to take artistic photos as we passed under the bridge itself.

On the other side of the bridge, the Orwell moved from beautiful Suffolk countryside to the business end of the Port of Ipswich – i.e. singularly unattractive and noisy. We were met with the sight of container ships and wharves to the right, a mountain of scrap metal to the left and a large, abandoned building and wasteland further on. Typically, as the river had now narrowed, we were obliged to start tacking up the channel without hitting steel wharves or the working vessel shifting ballast on the other quay side, moving backwards and forwards in and out of the channel as it worked. To the right were the Ipswich docks, now a marina accessed through a lock where various of the old dock buildings have been regenerated into shops and

restaurants. I imagine this is nice place to moor up so long as you close your eyes and ears between the bridge and the lock and never look back once you are in.

Our target route was to take the New Cut which runs to the left of the marina. We had read that a flood defence had been built at the entrance of the New Cut – similar to the one at Wivenhoe. But we had not anticipated that the gap through the high brick walls would be quite so narrow – it was a bit of shock to see and realise that we needed to tack through it as the wind was still on the nose at this point. Jenny managed to get through in one fetch and was too pre-occupied tacking up a narrow channel between a high concrete bank and moored boats to notice that Nigel took several goes to get through. Jenny finally reached the end of the cut which opens out slightly as the road blocks navigation, providing just about enough room to turn round a Sprint 15. With deep irony, Jenny found herself tacking back out of the same narrow channel she had just tacked up. Nigel had a more straightforward journey out of the cut. We re-grouped the other side of the flood defence and ran back past all the industry towards the Orwell Bridge and the gateway to the pretty part of the river again.

We stuck to the west side of the river on the way out, admiring the 16th century Freston Tower which I have been lucky enough to stay in – a Landmark Trust property with stunning views. We then passed Woolverstone Marina where SB Ironsides was residing temporarily – looking splendid on the end of the pontoon in the sunshine. We then toyed with stopping off at Pin Mill – but with a stiff breeze dead behind us, we did not think there was room to turn round and stop at the end of the channel without launching ourselves literally into the Butt and Oyster. We could have taken our mains down and gone in under bare poles but the tide was well into the ebb now so we felt we should probably keep going.

The breeze and gusts increased so we had a lively beat back to Levington and a decidedly boisterous sail out of the mouth of the Orwell, across the Stour entrance and past the Felixstowe container ships. The water really does get turbulent here

on the ebb and this time, it did not flatten out at all past Ha'Penny Pier. So we hurtled out of Harwich Harbour, picked a gap between the gusts that were rushing across from the Felixstowe shore, took a deep breath and bore off towards the sailing club beach. Fortunately, we both managed the final stretch without pitchpoling and without hitting the beach in the surf. This time we had completed 20.7 NM and still with a fastest speed of 16 knots – but it had taken us 4 hours, such are the vagaries of being determined to reach the farthest point of navigation!

With the boats packed away, we headed across to Ha'Penny Pier for a coffee and to meet up with Pit Crew Dave who had joined us for the next few days. Dave was working during the day and converted his van to an office with the best views by parking on the river front. After Dave had finished work, we had a lovely meal in the Samuel Pepys where, for the first time in my life, I was served cauliflower cheese with a chicken kiev and it was marvellous.

Day 3 had a more favourable wind forecast – a steady 3 – 4 without the gusts of the previous two days and more sunshine. A perfect day to explore the Walton Backwaters without worrying about being sailed halfway up the saltings of a narrow creek in a freak gust. We had a number of goals to tick off today: Sue at Harwich Town SC had told us about the large colony of seals at Oakley Creek; and we also wanted to get as close as we could to Beaumont Quay at the far corner of the Backwaters – once a regular haunt for barges although power lines now block the final path for any boats with an upright mast. We also wanted to circumnavigate Horsey Island via Hamford Water, cross the roadway, go up the Twizzle and Foundry Reach as far as the Walton and Frinton YC and then head back out via the Walton Channel. To do any of the above, we needed to time the tides right as - whilst it is a large expanse of water - at the top of the tide, much of it disappears very quickly.

Today we headed right instead of left. We had a quick sail out past the Breakwater where Banksy may, or may not, have created one of his summer holiday art works nearby.

We ran out to the Pye End buoy and then fetched across Dovercourt Bay to the buoys marking the entrance of the Backwaters - just like proper sailors. We turned right into Hamford Water and set off to find the entrance to Oakley Creek. It was about two hours before high water so we were not sure how far up the creek we would get.

Nigel spotted the topsail of a Thames Barge floating over the top of the land - or, more accurately, sailing out of Oakley Creek. It turned out to be the SB Cygnet - one of the smaller barges at only 16 tons - which meant two things: firstly, if she could get up the creek at that state of tide, we certainly could and secondly, this would be a great photo opportunity. We crossed paths at the entrance of the creek and took several photos of a majestic, historic craft working the waters the same way she had done for 140 years.

Cygnet was carrying a full set of sails and we are pretty sure she was being sailed single-handed.

Cygnet headed off towards Walton Creek and we headed into Oakley Creek which has a well-marked channel - well, several channels in fact. We reached a fork and saw a huge number of seals up on the bank enjoying the sunshine and untroubled by us. As we sailed up the channel, they were along the bank watching us curiously and also swimming in the water. It was lovely to see. We turned round and headed back to the fork. Jenny chose to sail up the left-hand channel but Nigel elected not to follow. Jenny got as far as the landing stage at the end of the creek and then commenced the 15 short tacks it took her to get back out to the main creek again.

We then headed back out into Hamford Water - passing the first of many boats of humans that would visit that day so the seals could watch them for their entertainment.

Turning right, we left Horsey Island to port and picked up the channel past Skipper Island en route to Beaumont Quay. It was champagne sailing - a lovely breeze, bright sunshine and a maze of river channels and salt marsh. We reached Landermere Quay with its small group of houses and seriously large pile of kayaks and followed the creek round as far as we could get towards Beaumont Creek. We got within sight of the overhead power cables that block the path and



turned round. We had hoped to find a route to leave Skipper Island to port so we could say that we had circumnavigated it, but all we could see was tufts of grass sticking up where we thought the channel was and decided that trying to tack through that would not be sensible. So we retraced our steps and tacked up the channel leaving Skipper Island to starboard (22 tacks in total, in case you were wondering).

As we neared Hamford Water again, we met SB Cygnet who had sailed round Horsey Island since we last saw her. Cygnet turned into the channel we had just left and probably got as far as we did. In fact, in recent years, Cygnet lowered her gear and travelled under the power lines all the way up to Beaumont Quay so she is made of determined stuff. Conversely, we turned right into Kirby Creek from where Cygnet had just travelled. In the distance to our left, we could see a fleet of sailing dinghies from Walton and

Frinton YC who, we guessed, were racing around Horsey Island. We followed Kirby Creek round to the left and were delighted to see another group of seals on the sand bank. The channel then widened out into the Twizzle (does anyone know where it got its name from?) crossing the causeway to Horsey Island and heading across to Titchmarsh Marina. The channel then narrowed again and we dodged a couple of frankly enormous gin palaces making their way into the

marina before turning right into Foundry Reach and following the narrow channel with about a million small port and starboard markers all the way up to the Yacht Club, at which point we ran out of river so turned round to head back into the Walton Channel for the final sail out of the Backwaters - fortunately, before meeting the large fleet of dinghies coming in the other way.

We reached Stone Point just after the top of the tide and some two hours after we had entered the Backwaters. Jenny dutifully followed the channel markers out into

Dovercourt Bay whilst Nigel returned to form and struck out across the point because "he wanted to make it to Harwich without having to tack". It was still only a force 3 - 4 so we were not at all overpowered - but the waves across Dovercourt Bay were pretty impressive and it was a wet sail back. Whilst at the Sprint 15 Nationals in Dovercourt Bay in 2019 - we experienced the most challenging sea state I have ever sailed in - so both Nigel and I approached this stretch with a very healthy respect. But it was a cracking sail back to the Breakwater and then a fetch back to the sailing club. It had taken four hours to sail 23.1 NM and we were delighted to have ticked off everything on our wish list.

Photo above: Nigel passes SB Cygnet at the entrance to Oakley Creek
Opposite top: the view across the Ha'penny Pier towards Shotley ad the Orwell
Opposite middle: Passing Eye End Buoy
Bottoms Up: Fleet Commodore Nigel and Pit-Crew Dave at ThaiUp at The Quay
Photos by Jenny Ball

Day 4 – 30mph gusts from the north put paid to our plan to raid the River Deben, so we took a lay day and, instead caught the Harwich Foot Ferry across to Languard Point as we were still determined to get afloat!



Overshadowed by Felixstowe Port and the forlorn/sinister/historic (depending on your point of view) remains of the fort, Languard Point was a melancholy place even in mid-August. We walked around the point, identifying the different navigation marks off shore, the various large ships and the strange bridge-like structure we could see in the distance. As we crossed the dunes, a young lad out walking with his parents stopped us out of the blue and asked if we would like to hear a joke. Nigel and I politely said yes. The joke was along the lines of – “Police have been called to the scene of an accident involving a lorry full of cheese. They say there is de-brie everywhere”. He and his family then walked off. Nigel and I were left with the conviction that Pit Crew Dave had planted this young lad so we could not escape his jokes, even though he had to work.

Whilst walking back to the ferry point we took to Google to find out that the bridge-like structure was the Principality of Sealand which features in a book I have read where the author visits locations in each Shipping Forecast area. If you haven't heard of Sealand do look it up – it's an interesting story.

The ferry journey back to Harwich brought home just how windy it really was but it had been a great way to see another part of this fascinating natural harbour. Nigel and I headed to the Pier Hotel to have a coffee and wait for Dave to finish his meetings. We had a slightly bizarre encounter with a local TV personality from neighbouring Jaywick and his guests that I won't put into writing – but there is clearly something about Nigel that encourages strangers to talk to us out of the blue. Perhaps they think he is Father Christmas off-duty.

Day 5 and with the winds still in the north, we had the opportunity to straight-line sail from Harwich to Marconi. So, we loaded up the road trailer with everything we would need (including our trollies and change of

clothes) and Dave kindly drove the trailer back to Marconi. The aim was to arrive there on or before high water at 4pm.

Unlike previous days, we were leaving well before high water which made launching more challenging and also meant we were going to stick closely to navigation markers so we did not hit the ground half way across Dovercourt Bay. We headed out to Pye End buoy again and then across towards the Naze Tower. The winds were much lighter but there was still a lot of large waves left over from the strong winds from the day before. It was slow going and quite frustrating with the rolling waves knocking all the wind out of the sails. It took an hour to reach the Naze Tower and there was still a long way to go.



But Walton Pier came into view soon after and the waves calmed down a bit as we had some shelter from the headland. As anyone who has done the Piers Race will know, the journey between Walton and Clacton Piers takes an absolute age. Fortunately, as we passed Holland on Sea, we were treated to a display by the Red Arrows who were performing for the Clacton (not) Air Show this year. We then reached Clacton Pier and the flotilla of spectator boats in time for

the Battle of Britain fly past and were treated to a great display directly overhead. Jenny sailed through the spectator fleet and waited for Nigel on the other side as apparently Nigel was unable to sail and look at the sky at the same time.

The wind was very fickle as we made our way past Point Clear, but finally we cleared the headland past the entrance to the Colne (which was the flattest I had ever seen the Colne Bar) and we were still making good progress with the tide under us. We ticked off the familiar landmarks – the Moliette, the Nass Beacon, the Baffle, Radio Caroline, Thirslet Buoy and finally home. We completed 26NM in 4 ½ hours and arrived at Marconi at the top of the tide, exactly as intended. Pete Richardson was there to help us with the trollies – a great help as we were quite tired by then.

The boats were packed away and then Jenny drove Nigel to Chelmsford station to get the train back to Harwich to collect his van and head home. This should have been a straightforward journey – but a 1 ½ hour wait at Manningtree meant that we sailed the distance in less time than it took by train! That's progress for you.

It was a great week of sailing, notching up 100 miles across four days and only one day lost to the wind. We are grateful to Pit Crew Dave and to everyone at Harwich Town SC who made it possible. We still have plans to go back to the Deben and also the neighbouring Alde – especially as we then found out that Daniel and Maya Sturm had been part of an F18 raid on those two rivers at the same time as our adventure. We also have plans to visit rivers to the south of our county. That's the beauty of the East Coast: there is always somewhere new to explore. Watch this space...



National Championships

Mark Aldridge hits three bullseyes on Day 2 to secure the Trophy

Forty Sprint-15 sailors made a welcome return to WPNSA in Weymouth for our 2021 National Championships - a nice-race, 3-day event from June 26th to 28th.

Many competitors took the opportunity to travel down on Friday to extend the weekend (it's the only type of holiday most of us were likely to get this year after all!), and were blessed with champagne sailing conditions of glorious sunshine and a decent breeze.

Mother Nature had some tricks up her sleeve, but the fleet enjoyed sunshine and a light, but sailable breeze on Day 1, so with three back-to-back races planned, it was looking very promising. Bryan Drake was our Race Officer for the weekend - his first time with the Sprint-15 fleet - and the WPNSA Committee boat Gyrinus was on station to set the fleet off for the scheduled start time, racing in the harbour.

Race 1 got off to a clean start and some of the fleet got their first lesson that Gyrinus creates quite a wind shadow at the end of the line. Those that started close to the pin-end found that the left-hand side of the course also paid off. Stuart Snell (Grafham) rounded the windward mark first, followed by Jenny Ball (Marconi) and the rest of the pack not far behind. Once around mark 2, the fleet had an interesting time trying to locate mark 3 - an aquamarine buoy being quite hard to spot against an aquamarine sea and the backdrop of the distant harbour wall. The length of the run coupled with the light breeze meant that the sailors had plenty of time to look for it, but it did make for an interesting fanning-out of the fleet. Eventually it was located and the RO decided one lap was enough and finished Stuart first, with second, third and fourth for Marconi sailors Jenny, Kevin Kirby and Jon Pearse.

Race 2 and the wind shifted in the final part of the start sequence to several cries of anguish, particularly from those who had held back at the committee boat end. Jim Bowie (Thorpe Bay) was fine apart from having started the race at the one-minute signal by mistake and had not clocked the U-flag so made elaborate, but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to exonerate himself by rounding both ends of the line. Meanwhile youth helm and two-up entry Sophia and Sean McKenna (Shanklin) had made a great start at the pin-end of the line and tracking out to the far left paid off. They rounded the windward mark first and maintained an unassailable lead. Stuart worked his way up to second, followed by Scott Wilcox (Stewartby) and Chris Tillyer (Thorpe Bay).



Report by Jenny Ball
Photos by Pauline Love

2021@

Race 3 had a clean start and most of the fleet tracked left again, but those few who headed right quickly profited. Keith Persin (Thorpe Bay) found himself in front heading to mark 1, and only Stuart and Chris managed to sneak around in from of him on port. Liam Thom (Shanklin) did a great job on the downwind leg to move himself into contention and went on to take a closely fought win ahead of Stuart, Chris and Simon Giles (Shanklin) in his shiny new boat. The fleet then headed back to shore after thanking the Committee Boat team and anyone else in the safety boats they happened to see - much to the bemusement of the race management team.

Evening activities got underway promptly with the Class Association AGM - well attended thanks to the WPNSA opening the bar for table-service nice and early.



The AGM was informal and efficient and may have broken a record for shortest time...or would have done had it not been for the Event Secretary rattling on about all the other events taking place this year that she would really like people to turn out for!

The AGM was followed by an enjoyable evening meal served by the WPNSA catering team, and although mingling was not permitted indoors, it was the closest thing to near-normal being able to sit down and enjoy a meal with good friends at a sailing event again.

Sunday morning dawned with the least mid-summer weather imaginable. Lots of rain overnight and

more forecast for most of the day. The wind was blowing a steady 26 knots+ creating interesting conditions out in the harbour. The breeze was due to settle to a F5-6 by lunchtime so a short postponement was proposed to align with the forecast. Whilst not a popular decision with everyone, the majority of the fleet were supportive and after less than an hour, most of the fleet set sail, although some chose to sit out the first race and see if any carnage ensued before venturing out themselves...

Thus began Race 4 in a fresh breeze which made up for the light winds of the day before and also flipped some of the positions at the front of the fleet. Sophia and Sean again got a great start near the pin-end and headed left which was favourable. After battling for three laps, Mark Aldridge (Grafham) emerged as the winner, with Sophia and Sean second, David Ball (Marconi) third and Steve Sawford (Rutland) fourth.



Race 5 and the rest of the fleet came out to play once they realised that everyone was intact and boats were not being turned into matchsticks. It was an eventful start - in their bid to get a clear lane on the busy start line, both Richard Chidwick (North Devon) and Jenny were U-flagged, unfortunately only finding out when reading the "whiteboard of doom" on the back of the committee boat at the end of lap 1. Additionally, Jim Bowie (Thorpe Bay) found a shackle pin on his tramp which had fallen from the main halyard. So his sail was falling down the mast whilst the halyard ring and shackle were still firmly attached to the hook at the top. With the help of the safety crew, Jim's boat was capsized and the halyard ring, hook and sail were all reunited correctly - albeit at the expense of his race. Fortunately this was the only rescue required all weekend.

Meanwhile, back to Race 5 and by lap 2 Mark had established a clear lead to take his second win. A stellar performance from Gordon Deuce (Brightlingsea) put him in second (regretting that he had not sailed the first race of the day!). Angus Cook and Hector Bunclark (both from North Devon) were close behind. Towards the end of the race, the fleet were treated to a tremendous downpour of rain which must have made the volunteer race management team feel that they deserved a pay rise.

Race 6 proved that the downwind leg can be as much a deciding factor as the upwind, with lots of fleet place changes. Rob Wilson (Stone) put in an amazing performance, rounding mark 4 in second place and finishing sixth overall. Mark took his third consecutive race win, with Steve second, Paul Craft (Worthing) third and Liam fourth.

Race 7 and the wind softened for the final race of the day. Mother Nature again had a surprise in store and switched up the wind about three-quarters of the way to the windward mark. Those who had gone to the right, or up the middle of the course, now found themselves on a broad reach to the mark, whilst those who had banged the left corner found themselves unpleasantly in the wrong place. The reach from mark 1 to 2 became a run, and the next two

legs were, obviously, all the wrong way around. All of which made for lots of shifting places with Liam taking his second win ahead of David Ball (Thorpe Bay), Mark and Geoff Tindale (Stone).

The fleet then headed home after four great races in five hours of sailing - a testament to the impressive racing turnaround of the RO and the mark-layers on a wet, gloomy and breezy day in what was supposed to be mid-summer.

The Class Association dinner was held in the evening - another welcome return to normality. The catering staff were particularly patient as we all sat at the wrong tables and tried to remember what meals we had ordered. Much of the evening was spent consulting forecasts ahead of the final day's racing and trying to find one that involved more than two knots.

Day three dawned with seven races in the bag and two to go. The Championship still had much to play for, and a further race would trigger another discard which could change fortunes across the fleet.

The Events Secretary and WPNSA Race Management team held their daily briefing early - the first race was scheduled at 11am but there was no sailable wind until a potential 5-6 knot breeze at midday. Race management sent their RIBs out to take regular wind readings, whilst the ever-optimistic fleet got their boats ready and reminisced about the same situation three years earlier when no wind materialised and we had to go home early.

But, right on cue, a breeze appeared in the right direction, and racing was on! The fleet set off in shorts and t-shirts as if it was late June (which it was) and marvelled at how different the weather was from the day before.

Race 8 started in a good - if not exciting - breeze which required tactical thinking to pick the right way upwind in particular. A lot of the fleet went left although the few that went right seemed to do okay. True to form, Liam picked the right up the course to come first, with Stuart second and Mark third. Gary Sverdlhoff (Thorpe Bay) put in an

excellent performance to come fourth, despite one youth sailor trying port-hand ramming tactics at the windward mark on the second lap with a resounding bang that most of us heard. But no damage was done and both boats were able to finish appropriately, so all was well.

With another superbly quick turnaround from the Race Management team, Race 9 got underway in a softening breeze. True to form, much of the fleet went left but a few souls ducked the boats on starboard and headed right. When they tacked back they found that the left-hand fleet had sailed into even softer breeze. Pete Richardson (Marconi) - true to his boat's name "Bandit" - had pulled out a lead around the first mark with Jenny close behind. Jenny, Pete and Geoff had a very tense - if not very quick - downwind leg to mark 3, after which Geoff and Pete had their own private race from marks 3 to 4 which deviated quite some way from the lay-line. On the final leg to the finish, Jenny tacked to clear the back of the committee boat and checked the "whiteboard of doom" to ensure she had not been U-flagged again. Despite a significant shift that lifted both Geoff and Pete, Jenny managed to keep in front to take the race win. The rest of the fleet had rapidly pulled in by now but lots of the front runners ended up mid-back and vice-versa.

The fleet headed home, very happy to have got in all nine races.

The prize-giving was held outdoors and led by the Events Secretary Jenny - the Chairman being temporarily unavailable due to a non-sailing related injury.

The Sprint-15 Association would like to extend its heartfelt thanks to WPNSA for hosting, and to Bryan Drake and all the volunteers for enabling such good racing. We would also like to thank all of the new competitors who turned out to support this event in such interesting times. Many thanks to Pauline Love as chief photographer, and to Tom Phipps at Windsport for supporting the event across the whole weekend. We also discovered he can make top-notch paper aeroplanes...



Main photo: Andrew Berisford leading the peloton round the windward mark.
 Below: Mark Aldridge is presented with the Championship trophy by WPNSA RO Bryan Drake
 Photos by Pauline Love

And the Winners are...

Spot prizes were awarded to Rob Wilson (Stone), Gordon Deuce, Geoff Tindale and Daren Fitchew (Thorpe Bay), Gary Sverdlhoff and Peter Richardson for stellar individual race performances. And also to Jim Bowie for his UFD round the end and losing his main halyard shackle pin... and becoming a household sail number with the entire WPNSA Race Management team. It is a distinct possibility that there will be a perpetual spot prize at future Nationals entitled "What Jim did this Year". Watch this space...

- Youth trophy - Sophia McKenna
- Over 50s trophy - Mark Aldridge
- Over 60s trophy - Scott Wilcox
- Over 70s trophy - Stuart Snell
- Heavyweight trophy - Jim Pearse
- Pro-Am trophy - Jason Clarke / Mark Aldridge
- Most Improved trophy - Jason Clarke
- Most Persistent trophy - Jemma Clarke
- Two-Up trophy - Sophia and Sean McKenna

First Runner-Up - Liam Thom

Sprint-15 National Champion 2021- Mark Aldridge



OVERALL RESULTS													
Competitors			Races - 9 of 9 Sailed (No. of Discards: 2)									Event Placings	
Name	Sail	Club	Race 1	Race 2	Race 3	Race 4	Race 5	Race 6	Race 7	Race 8	Race 9	Points	Place
Mark Aldridge	2027	Grafham Water SC	5	9	4 -DNF	1	1	1	3	3	28	23	1
Liam Thom	1957	Shanklin SC	11	17	1	7	5	4	1	1	19	30	2
Angus Cook	1893	North Devon YC	12	5	8	6	3	7	7	10	4	40	3
Stuart Snell	2022	Grafham Water SC	1	2	2	4 -DNC	10	17	8	2	24	42	4
David Ball	1923	Marconi SC	15	7	6	3	8	11	2	6	23	43	5
Chris Tillyer	2020	Thorpe Bay YC	9	4	3	8	6	10	5	4 -BFD	4 -DNS	45	6
Jenny Ball	2025	Marconi SC	2	10	5	12	4 -BFD	12	17	7	1	49	7
Hector Bunclark	1951	North Devon YC	6	11	7	16	4	9	6	8	21	51	8
Simon Giles	2029	Shanklin SC	14	6	4	14	22	5	11	5	12	57	9
Steve Sawford	1989	Rutland Water SC	7	12	14	4	9	2	22	20	34	68	10
Sophia McKenna & Sean McKenna	2018	Shanklin SC	30	1	24	2	19	18	14	12	5	71	11
Scott Wilcox	1359	Stewartby Water SC	26	3	20	15	7	14	12	13	11	75	12
Paul Craft	1939	Worthing SC	22	14	18	5	12	3	19	15	9	76	13
Geoff Tindale	2017	Stone SC	18	15	20	10	11	21	4	17	2	77	14
Gordon Deuce	2024	Brightlingsea SC	10	26	23	4 -DNC	2	13	9	16	22	95	15
Skip Atkins	1821	Stone SC	13	34	13	20	20	8	20	14	10	98	16
Jason Clarke	1917	Marconi SC	21	30	11	11	13	23	21	19	13	109	17
Jon Pearse	1988	Marconi SC	4	20	27	13	14	29	23	22	15	111	18
Steve Healy	1921	Thorpe Bay YC	20	13	9	4 -DNC	15	19	24	33	14	114	19
Kevin Kirby	1776	Marconi SC	3	16	19	19	27	26	37	37	7	117	20
Gary Sverdlhoff	1963	Thorpe Bay YC	32	30	16	23	16	15	25	4	20	119	21 ¹
George Love	2019	Carsington SC	25	8	17	4 -DNC	28	22	13	9	25	119	22 ¹
Keith Persin	1981	Thorpe Bay YC	23	31	10	18	21	25	18	25	17	132	23
Gerald Sverdlhoff	1333	Thorpe Bay YC	17	18	12	21	31	33	15	24	29	136	24
Andrew Heath	1256	North Devon YC	39	29	24	24	17	16	16	11	37	137	25
Jim Bowie	2021	Thorpe Bay YC	8	40	32	17	4 -DNS	20	27	28	18	150	26
Daren Fitchew	1642	Thorpe Bay YC	37	25	33	9	24	30	10	31	32	161	27
Richard Chidwick	2004	North Devon YC	27	24	15	25	4 -BFD	27	29	18	33	165	28
Andrew Berisford	2026	Brightlingsea SC	16	28	30	4 -DNC	26	32	32	34	8	172	29 ¹
Rob Bailey	1755	Thorpe Bay YC	35	23	35	22	18	28	28	23	30	172	30 ¹
Peter Richardson	1983	Marconi SC	24	19	26	41 DNC	4 -DNC	4 -DNC	41 DNC	21	3	175	31
Robert Wilson	1966	Stone SC	36	37	34	29	29	6	30	29	26	183	32
Dave Clarke	1521	Marconi SC	31	36	29	27	23	35	31	32	16	189	33
Nigel James	2015	Marconi SC	19	21	4 -DNF	26	30	37	4 -DNF	27	31	191	34
Keith Chidwick	2016	Queen Mary SC	38	22	28	4 -DNC	35	34	33	35	6	193	35 ¹
Yvonne Pike	1965	Shanklin SC	29	35	36	28	25	24	26	26	38	193	36 ¹
Jemma Clarke	1339	Marconi SC	28	32	25	31	34	38	34	36	27	211	37
Peter Sherwin	1968	Stone SC	30	27	31	4 -DNF	33	31	35	30	35	217	38
Ben Penny	1529	North Devon YC	39	39	38	30	32	36	36	4 -DNC	4 -DNC	250	39
Lee Garton	1759	Marconi SC	40	38	37	4 -DNC	41 DNC	41 DNC	4 -DNC	38	36	271	40





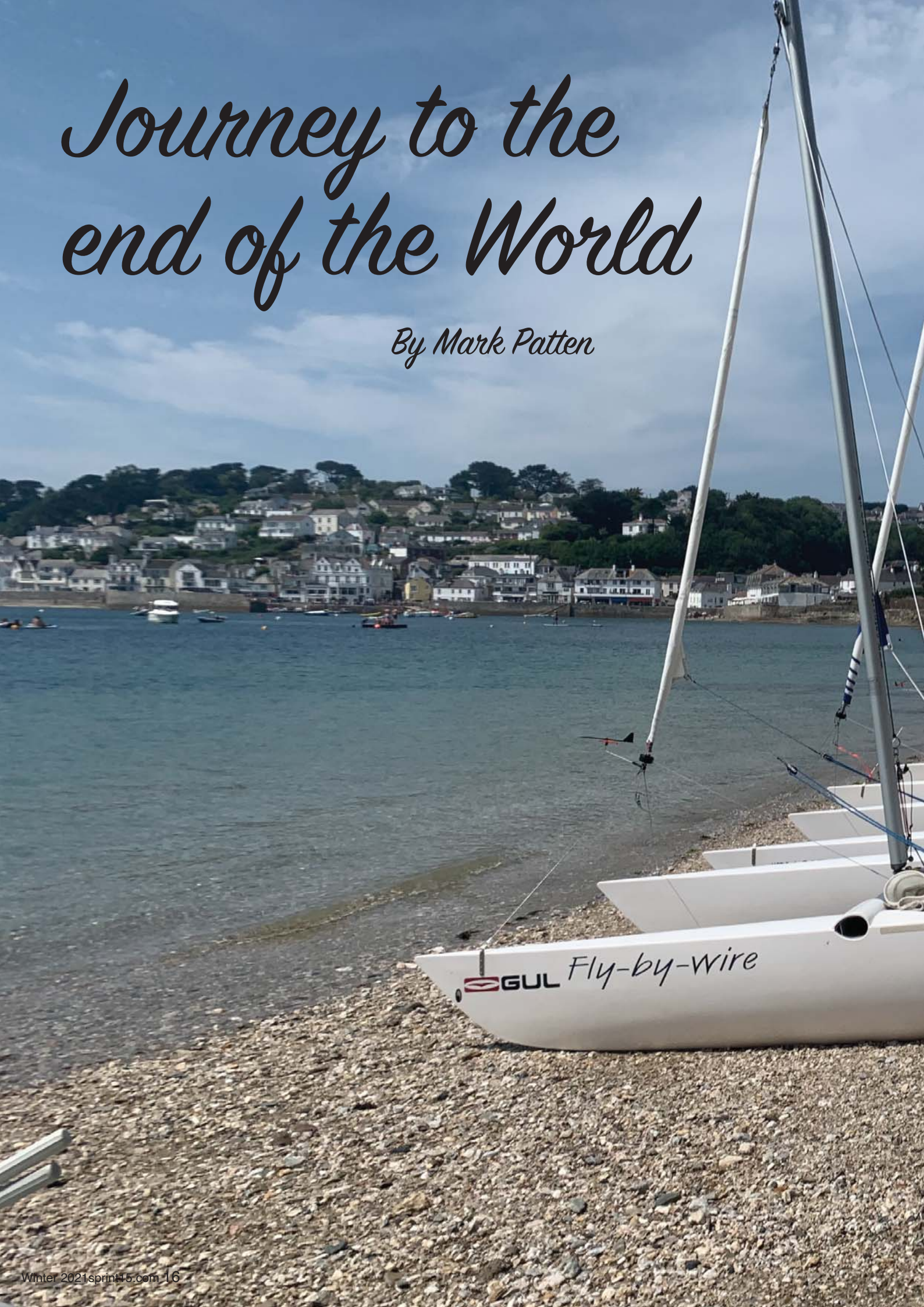
Day 1 competitors clockwise from top left: Sophia and Sean McKenna look pensive between the races; George Love looking not at all pensive; Keith Persin is unsure whether to do a "fly-by-wire" pose; Jemma Clarke sets a steady course for the Most Persistent; Paul Craft just about manages to not fall off in the 5 knot breeze; Steve Sawford looks forward to stronger breeze on Day 2.

Below: Competitors celebrate the end of another successful Championship. Photos by Pauline Love



Journey to the end of the World

By Mark Patten



Sprint 15 Summer Social Outing to
Windsport International at Mylor
19th - 23rd July 2021



I will start with the admission that I am a Dart 18 sailor (do forgive me...)
and so while a newcomer to the world of the 15, I have knowledge of both the catamaran and the 'Hallowed Ground' that is Windsport International's base in Mylor, near Falmouth, in deepest Cornwall.

A fellow 15 sailor, Andy Bunyan, from my home club of Stewartby in Bedford mentioned he had seen a post on the website regarding a Sprint 15 social meet up in July and was anyone interested in going? Neither of us had been before but we both wanted to visit so a plan was hatched!

We were camping on site on the terraced camping field complete with electrical hook-ups and right alongside the freshly installed shower and office facilities, all with a lovely view over the harbour.

The weather was very warm with a heatwave passing through and early in the week we had relatively light winds so while we were breaking no speed records, the time on the water with a breeze was most welcome. Coming from about as far from the sea as you can get and limited to our 200 acre lake, the available space and great scenic backdrops were wonderful.

Carrick Roads is the odd name for the deep estuary as it runs north past Falmouth, heading inland with several other valleys running into this main channel with the slopes being either farmed fields or woodland as they run down to the water. We spent some very pleasant hours on the first day touring around the estuary, venturing up and down the full length from open sea and then as far inland as we dared, as well as exploring the branches which led to other harbours and ports such as St. Just and St. Mawes.

There was a great variety of boats on the water and a joy to be out there with the yachts, motor cruisers and commercial fishing boats.

With a total of nine boats we had a number of 'excursions', some with crews but most single handed and

putting on a good show when we parked up for some lunch in any of the various places we managed to eat out at.

On one day when the wind was light, we ALL went up a creek to a new café that was so far inland through a steep sided valley that you could only motor to. Using Ed's RIB - carrying nine of us - this towed a 15 with a further 4 on-board - both craft sitting very low in the water and certainly made for a rather odd looking flotilla with the 15 flying the Class Association flag.



Later in the week, the wind picked up and our craft came into their own holding good, steady speed with some significant increases in wind as we passed an inlet or areas where the height of the shore reduced. It was so good to play in the waves and surf the wake of some of the bigger boats.

As a 'pond skater' this much space and more consistent wind was a delight compared to the rapid variability of wind force and direction experienced at my home lake. Thoughts of moving to



Cornwall were starting to run through my head...

Evenings consisted of BBQ's and visits to the pub, which as you can imagine was hard and relentless work - but we soldiered through.

Whilst it's a long way to Cornwall, the journey is undoubtedly worth the effort as it is a wonderful spot, not only for the

sailing, but for the superb facilities at Windsport and the general locality. There's lots to do and innumerable places to explore both on and off the water.

So, pick out your favourite in car entertainment, music and a sensible time of day to travel. The journey is on decent roads now and it passes quicker than you would imagine.

I, for one, will be going to Windsport for the Nationals in 2022 - hope to see you there!



Photos prior pages and this page: the beauty of arriving by boat means you don't have to figure out where to park on a sunny day in Cornwall. The Dart 15 fleet enjoying life on and off the water around Mylor.

Above: Windsport's campsite boasting superb views across the harbour.

Photos by George Love and Mark Patten



A few of you guys may have been on one of my training sessions with the class, and so will have heard a bit of this story before, but I bet for a lot of you sailors this might come as a bit of an awakening.

We all want to get the most out of our boat. Whether you are racing or just cruising, finding an extra gear for a bit more speed is always the aim. During my training sessions we often run through boat set up, and I tend to break things down in terms of 'permanent-ness': hull alignment at one end of the scale (not very adjustable) and mainsheet tension at the other end of the scale (very dynamic and adjustable). But somewhere in the middle of the range is the control most people don't really consider... batten tension!

The first thing I should mention on the subject is that the sails are all cut with a specific shape, and so when playing with batten tension you are either promoting that shape (creating depth) or demoting it (flattening). So let's start by having a think about that.

Looking at upwind performance where sail shape has its biggest effect, in the crudest sense we can say that a deep sail can generate lots of power, but it also creates more drag. This means it is a shape that has good initial acceleration, but a limited top speed. So, when accelerating is a focus, (lighter winds or big chop/waves) a deeper sail will have an advantage.

A flat sail produces far less drag, and so is capable of achieving much higher speeds. However, it lacks the grunt to get the boat going in the first place if the wind is light.

As ever with sailing there are some caveats, and of course everyone sails the boat differently, but it is worth mentioning that having a very deep sail in very light winds can 'hook' the leach and cause the sail to stall, so just bear that in mind!

Having established how sail shape affects the performance of the boat, we can use the batten tension to help push the sail in the direction you are trying to achieve. Pushing the battens in tighter when trying to create a deeper more powerful sail, and not pushing them in so tight if you want a flatter 'higher top speed' sail. Here are a few top tips to help when tensioning the battens:

- **Always take the tension off after sailing.** Firstly, this will make your sail shape last longer - often you see on old sails where the tension has been left on, the leach will flutter. This is because the sail will have stretched along the batten pocket and so produces slack points in between. Secondly, by untying the battens each day it forces you to re-tie them next time you sail and so you will actively think about how much tension you are applying and set up the sail more appropriately for the conditions.
- **Vertical creases are bad.** You will know if you haven't put in enough tension, because you will

start to see lots of small vertical creases along the batten pocket. Just taking the creases out is your starting point for tension.

- **Tension top to bottom.** I'm sure you will have all realised that the top battens are much harder to create shape in due to them being much shorter. Because of that you will end up pulling the top ties much harder than the bottom ones where it is easy to create shape over a longer batten. When tensioning the battens I tend to work from the top down knowing that, as I move down the sail, I won't need to pull the ties as hard.
- **Tensioning method** - I know some of you guys use the adjustable batten ends which most definitely make the batten tying process more efficient, however for those on the original style, there is a little technique you can use to produce the tension required. As you can see in the photo use a hard surface to pull the end of the batten (against the traveller track is perfect) and tie the first half of your reef knot before pulling. Apply the tension in the batten and pull the first half of the reef knot tight to secure in that tension. Tie the second half of the reef knot to lock it off and tuck the tails back inside the batten pocket to tidy them up. Using this method you will be able to even make the top battens pop from side to side for those days when you want a really 'grunty' sail!



By Tom Phipps



- **Calibrate** - It's really hard to consistently reference how tight you are pulling the batten ties. Until now you will probably have measured it on how much your thumbs hurt as you pull! I would suggest marking your batten where the leach of the sail sits on it. That won't always be the right place to put it, but it at least gives you a reference for where you are so you can play with it and find what works and then repeat it!

As I said at the start, batten tension is just a small part of boat set up, however I think it's often overlooked. Batten tension needs to work with all the other controls to fully get the most out of your boat, but as you progress in your sailing it's these small changes that will begin to make the difference in your performance.

As ever Windsport is here for parts and advise on all things Sprint 15, so give us a shout if you think we can help.

Looking forward to seeing you guys at our home here in Mylor for the Nationals 2022!

Cheers, Tom



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Caledonia Dreamin'

*111 nautical miles, 29 locks, 10 bridges,
4 aqueducts, 4 lochs... and one Dart 15*

By Liam Thom



(...or coast to coast on an overloaded boat...)

As Yvonne and I were preparing Biscuit to set off from near Oban towards Mull in 2019, there was a group of kayakers who were fettling their boats and donning mosquito nets ready for a trip up the Great Glen to Inverness.

Following them up the short cut was not an option for me - I had set out to circumnavigate the Island of Great Britain and Andy Jefferies had made it clear that there was no point in me returning to Shanklin if I had cheated and popped up the Caledonian Canal instead. However, seeing the kayakers did sow a seed in my mind about the next adventure.

Yvonne sailed Biscuit at the Draycote TT on the 10th July and after the one day regatta we left Dreadnought in the boat park and loaded Biscuit onto the trailer. We overnighted with Yvonne's mother in Southam and set off in the small hours for the west of Scotland.

We arrived at Dunstaffnage Marina near Oban at about two in the afternoon and got the boat's mast up and loaded her with provisions, clothes and camping equipment.

We hoisted the sails and pushed Biscuit out into the crystal clear waters of Ardmucknish Bay surrounded by moored yachts and islands and we paddled and sailed out past Dunstaffnage Castle on the left and Eilean Mor on the right.

To say we were travelling hopefully would be an understatement. We both had the same feeling of joy, contentment, excitement and expectation that I had two years ago when I finally passed between the Scottish island of Gigha and the Kintyre Peninsula. This time I had somebody fantastic to share it with. There was a bit of sun and a gentle north easterly and Biscuit was gliding along over the flat water.

We made our way out past the twin headlands of Rubha Fion-aird and Rubha Garbh-aird and into the Lynn of Lorn which divides the Isle of Lismore from the mainland. Porpoises were gambolling around us and seals were everywhere. We skirted past Eilean Dubh (black island) and might have landed for the night but for the lack of a decent beach and the family of pigs that were guarding the shore.

We tacked on along the Lismore coast until we found a pebbled beach towards the north east of the island near the small ferry port that connects it to the mainland. The tent was tied to rocks, driftwood and a catamaran and we rehydrated some pasta and bolognese. Some people were kicking a bag of wind around in London and we observed some of this on my phone but we were asleep long before they had decided who was better at kicking a ball.

We launched the next day at a very relaxed twenty to nine and sailed the half mile to Port Appin on the mainland and bought some provisions and post cards at the community shop. We then sat on the beach and had our breakfast. The pilot of the ferry came up to us and was most envious of our little craft and the simplicity of our mode of travelling. He owned one of the yachts that was moored in front of us but, on a sunny, light breeze day like that one, a Dart 15 looked the best boat in the world. We were not in too much of a rush as the tide was still against us for a few hours and it was gone half ten when we relaunched, with the

All ship shape and ready to go: leaving Dunstaffnage Marina, Oban.
Photo by Liam Thom



wind well ahead of the beam. We short-tacked along the shallows past yacht moorings, rocks, skerries, castles, inhabited and deserted islands and salmon farms and made our way north-east into Loch Linnhe. We were not travelling very fast but the further we went the more the wind swung behind us and we ended up gybing our way to the narrows at Corran where a very small patch of real sand and The Inn lured us ashore. We supped our drinks while watching the car ferry crew handle the fast tides of the strait with great skill.

When we launched, the tide was now firmly in our favour but the wind was coming from every conceivable direction in various strengths but after a few miles the wind settled down to a decent force 5 from behind us and we rocketed up the rest of Loch Linnhe at up to 14 knots with white streaks of water overtaking us but barely any waves to slow us down.

We were too late to enter the sea lock at Corpath so we landed on the sandy-enough beach at Caol just as a rainbow was forming in front of the snow-topped Ben Nevis. Dinner was a Chinese takeaway, eaten on the beach.

We did not put the mainsail up the next day and left the jib on the furler as we only had a hundred yards to go to the first lock gates and sailing is not allowed in the man-made sections of the canal. We rowed Biscuit across to the tall jetty to the left of the big gates and clambered up. The jetty was designed for way bigger craft than a Dart 15 and we were at the same height as the hound on Biscuit's mast.

The lock keeper was at work before the designated 8am start and he told me what the procedure was: the boat was to be lead through all the locks with nobody on her. We held Biscuit by two long ropes, one tied to the foot of the mast and the other to the port end of the rear beam. We had fenders everywhere we could tie them.

Before the gates opened there was a bit of current on the boat but she behaved herself. Then, as the gates opened, we had to pull the forward

rope as hard as we could to stop her disappearing off back down Loch Linnhe. When the torrent had stopped we walked her into the first lock and she followed patiently. Again, as the waters rose and the current swirled, Biscuit got spooked and wanted to bolt for it but we held on (with me wishing I knew where I had put my gloves). With the boat now eight foot higher than she was five minutes earlier, the gates opened onto a new vista of moored boats including a vast party boat from the States.

This time Biscuit did not want to be lead at all. She faced the wall and said she wasn't going any further. It took a bit of persuasion to make her change her mind. I tied a bit of string to the spare chain plate and tied rope to that instead of the mast but she still wouldn't lead in a straight line. We needed a rethink.

Having gone through three locks we were into the canal. It was 9.45am so decent progress was being made. We paddled along the next mile of



Top: The south coast of Lismore island with spectacular views across to the mainland.

The famous "Neptune's staircase" is quite an imposing sight when viewed from the deck of a Dart 15. Photos by Yvonne Pike

canal until we reached a pontoon to wait for the next gates to open. I walked across the railway line and main road up towards the lock keepers of Neptune's Staircase which is a series of eight locks preceded by two swing bridges. This is where I discovered that the canal has its own pace and you have to go with it. They were taking boats down the flight of locks, including the thirty foot tender to the party boat complete with very loud music. Taking these boats down the hill would take them all morning and then it would be their lunch time. So no progress before 1pm at the earliest. Time to sit at the café and watch the boats descend the Staircase and to get some provisions at the Spar shop in Caol.



Yvonne had a brew and I drank some pop and ate a snack. There was no hurry as we had been told the swing bridge at Moy - a few miles ahead of us - was shut at 3pm. The lock keepers had told us our options and the one that sounded best was a remote pontoon at Loy which they described as the honeymoon jetty.

We paddled on with a nice breeze behind us. Sometimes we took turns paddling, sometimes we both paddled but with the wind pushing us along the best tactic was for Yvonne to stand up and steer and me to stand up and paddle with the kayak oars joined together - taking advantage of the increased windage on our backs.

We found the jetty on the port side at half five and tied Biscuit to the wooden structure. It was not an ideal pontoon but there was no tide or waves to worry about and she seemed settled enough. We pitched our tent on the tow path and felt very pleased with ourselves. We had travelled eight miles in a day but we had entered an alien environment without making total fools of ourselves or sinking any boats.

Dinner was rehydrated curry. The pasta was better but it was hot food and good enough for us.

I was a little concerned that the next swing bridge might hold us up for several hours so I wanted to drop the mast and paddle under. We had wandered down the tow path the night before to take a look and we knew there was plenty of room to get under. Yvonne was dead against the idea. It would have been quite a faff with the mast and all the rigging and we would have to find a good spot to restep the mast. So in the end we paddled the mile to the Moy Bridge and tied up to the tall jetty which

had posts at just about the right distance apart to put the bow and stern against if we docked perfectly. We had our breakfast on the pontoon waiting for the lock keeper to arrive, with little expectation of an early start. However we were very pleasantly surprised when the lock keeper drove past on his way to the next lock and stopped and asked us if we wanted to go through. If we were wider he would have had to open one half of the bridge and row across to the other side and open the other but there was plenty of room to get through with half the bridge swung open.

The lock keeper said that lots of kayakers put sails up in the canal so from here onwards we had no hesitation in unfurling our jib and letting the south westerly push us along.

With the lock keepers at Gairloch expecting us, we lost little time getting through the two locks and a swing bridge before the gates opened into the beautiful Loch Lochy. We pointed the boat upwind and hoisted the mainsail and gybed our way between the steep wooded slopes in the sunshine. It was absolutely glorious conditions for sailing with mountains all around. Ben Nevis could have been one of the points to the south but there were so many mountains it was hard to tell.

We pulled up at a pontoon at the end of the Loch and waited for the swing bridge to open. I walked across to see the keeper but he was on his lunch so we had a short wait before we could progress. In the meantime a motor cruiser arrived in front of us with a very jolly group of people on board. I took their bow line and watched them pirouette downwind before taking the rope back and trying again.

We waited for a steam train [think Harry Potter] to pass over the swing bridge before slipping our lines and heading out towards the locks. This time I was going to stay on the boat and let Yvonne pull me through while I steered. There were rules against this which all the lock keepers for the next sixty miles were happy to ignore. Slowly Biscuit, and a yacht owned by a Hungarian couple, rose up the hill with a small crowd watching our progress. At each stage I went from being surrounded by dark walls to being able to see the outside world. Eventually I could look back down to the railway and the canal. Yvonne handed the lines to the lock keepers and stepped onto the boat. The doors opened and we could see a new world of canal, trees and mountains. We paddled out of the last lock and tied up to a wall.



This photo: The "Honeymoon jetty"
 Top right: Biscuit behaving herself as we climb Neptune's Staircase
 Opposite left: every turn in the canal reveals another beautiful landscape
 Top left: Liam not posing as we wait for the gates to be opened

Photos by Yvonne & Liam

I suggested they give me the stern line as well next time and we got them docked safely. Then a second boat came along and tried to raft next to the first boat. They gave them the bow line and the bow blew downwind just like the first. At the same time another motor cruiser was trying to hold station by pointing downwind and reversing into the wind.

was ahead of us downwind. He pointed to the motor cruiser in the distance hurtling towards us with people in day-glo orange lifejackets: "*The person in charge of that boat might be the captain of the QEII*" he said, "*but I expect he isn't*". So we moved Biscuit out of their way and grabbed their lines. Then a second boat arrived, tied on their bow line and rotated downwind. If we hadn't untied Biscuit and moved her even further out the way she would have been crushed.

Once through the swing bridge there was a short canal section before Cullochey Lock. The wind was nicely howling and we were managing six knots on the jib alone. The lock gates were open to us as we approached and we furled the jib early and let the boat coast in on bare bones only. She was still doing two knots as we went through the lock gates

By two o'clock we had passed through all the locks and bridges of Laggan and we were now in Loch Oich which was as lovely as the last one but now with more wind. We gybed our way down the short loch and were through in no time. Again we had to stop at a pontoon at the end of the loch and wait for a swing bridge. We took the nearest end and tied up. The lock keeper asked me to move down the pontoon but I explained I wanted a good run up to get round the wooden structure that

despite us both paddling backwards. Fortunately there was somebody to take our lines and we were brought to a halt without shortening the boat's bows on a motor cruiser. The lady who stopped us said it was thirty knots: "*Shhh,*" I said, "*I told Yvonne it was twenty*".

The water in the locks was now going down rather than up. There was one more lock and a few miles of meandering canal with pine trees

growing out over the water's edge. It was quite beautiful.

We had expected to be shattered from all the rowing but in the end the jib and the Force 6 was doing all the work. Biscuit was a bit of a runaway pony.