

## *Ramble* to the Vice Commodore's Meet

Elizabeth Bierton

*Ramble* is a 40 year old 16ft Shipmate Dayboat that I keep on a half-tide mooring in Penryn, Cornwall. She is a sloop with a centre-plate. When my sailing buddy, Gillie Watson (RCC), went to Australia for three years, she put *Canog* on the hard and I lost my sailing fix. Then I found *Ramble* for only £400 including trailer. She has no modern technology aboard, being mostly used for day-sailing around Falmouth Bay and on its rivers. A lead line, an outboard with no neutral, a camping stove kept at the bottom of a



plastic box and a bucket are the order of the day. I had only slept on board for four nights before this trip.

The Vice Commodore's Meet was planned for Mounts Bay in west Cornwall, with Helford or Falmouth as backups in case of foul weather. So many people were travelling hundreds of miles to the meet when I only had to go thirty, that I decided to make the effort. For three weeks I anxiously watched the weather and bought some safety gear. Secretly I hoped they would change the venue. The weather apps, however, all seemed to show a few days of perfect north to northwesterly winds, so I

determined to go.

### The outward passage

Monday, 25th May - I had hoped to be off by 0930, but by the time I had fitted everything into the boat and organised all the essential safety gear, it was 1118 when I finally left. I streamed the log at Pendennis Point and set a course for the Manacles. The wind was NW3. We reached the Manacles Buoy by 1330 and headed for the Lizard, sailing as close to windward as possible. The wind had more west in it than the forecast had promised, and the falling tide was sweeping us towards Biscay. All the other yachts seemed to be zooming past; the sea was stopping but not breaking, so at 1520 I tacked closer to the point, finally passing the Lizard rocks at 1730. It had taken four hours to make just ten miles.

At 1800 we needed the outboard to make any headway at all as the wind was now NW2 - straight from the Mount. The sea was bumpy for several miles into the bay. As the light faded I regretted leaving my 30 year old copy of *The Shell Pilot to the English Channel* behind. Mullion Cove, Poldhu Cove and Porthleven looked tempting, but I was nervous about the wind turning westerly again and trapping me, so I kept on going into the dark.

By 2230 it was very dark. At 2317 we passed Mountamopus cardinal marker, course 320° to the west of St Michael's Mount

I motored towards the lights of Longrock. As I past the Mount, I stopped every few minutes to lower the lead. Whenever I found no bottom by six metres I turned the engine back on and crept closer to the beach.

Tuesday 0035 - Anchored in 5m near Longrock. It was flat calm as I listened to the waves gently breaking on the shore. I ate oatcakes and cheese, and drank wine straight from the bottle. A train snaked along the shore, brightly lit along its length.

### The Meet

Later in the morning I saw the first RCC yachts anchoring close in to the Mount. At about 1000 I pulled up my anchor and anchored alongside *Wild Song* in 5m.

Paul Heiney and his crew, 'Ant' (Anthony Fawcett RCC), kindly picked me up for coffee and fruitcake aboard *Wild Song* and later dropped me back on *Ramble*. I spent the afternoon sketching the Mount above me until Aidri Burnett from *Cassis* rowed over. We sat in the wind for a while, then, as I had no milk or sugar in my stores, she suggested we go to *Cassis* for tea and fruitcake.

Throughout the afternoon more and more large yachts arrived, looking sleek and powerful as they anchored under the Mount. Jeremy Burnett dropped me back to finish my drawing. At 1800 the party started on *Wild Song* and she sank lower and lower as more and more people clambered aboard. For a while there was that uneasy feeling of top-heavy teetering.

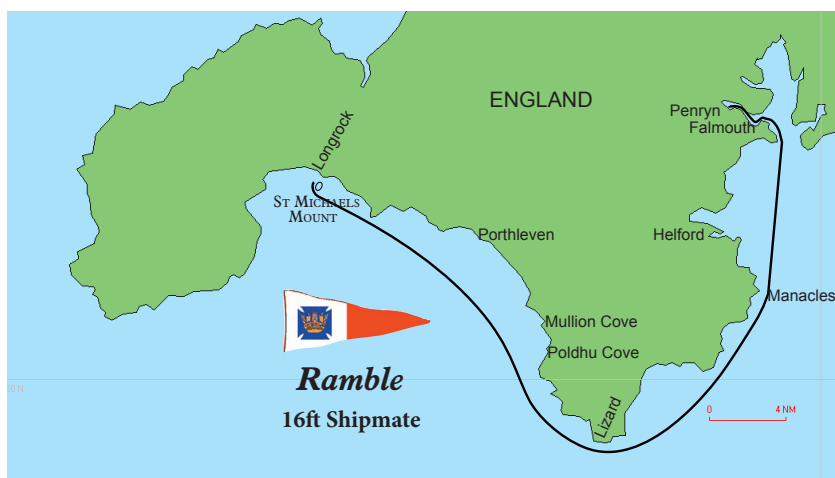
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Paul closed all the seacocks.

I met some lovely people and must go through the book to try to fit names to yachts. More and more yachts arrived and crews came to chat, including two children and a large dog. The wind dropped completely by 2000. When the party was over, Paul invited Henry and Louise Clay, Mervyn Wheatley, Jeremy and Aidri Burnett and me for an amazing curry that Ant had cooked. We sat in the warm comfort of Paul's boat and told profound sailors yarns - nothing to do with the amount of wine that had been flowing, of course.

### The Return

Wednesday 27th May, 0555 - Up anchor in flat calm. Perfect weather - for motoring. A land mist over the hills to the east was slowly swallowing up everything behind me like a scene from a horror film. Then St Michaels Mount itself disappeared in black fog. As I watched it obscuring more and more of the coast, I was becoming worried about rowing around the Lizard in thick fog.



At 0715 I filled the engine, only to find that I didn't have enough two-stroke oil to make up the next litre. I thought about when I would really want the engine most: at the Lizard itself and then later in Falmouth when I would be tired and just want to be safe on my mooring.

So for the time being I decided to row. I think I made about 2kts. It wasn't easy to keep the course as *Ramble* wanted to veer off to port. Still, I rowed for two hours and made maybe four miles. It was quiet and beautiful without the engine. Gannets were diving and I had a glimpse of dolphins. It would have been perfect but for that creeping fog.

Then *Permania* came up and kindly offered to tow me to the Lizard. A

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brief calculation of my course, speed and tides had me gratefully accepting, and I was towed like a sprat behind a large, powerful whale. When we reached the Lizard rocks there was still no wind, so after a brief pause for coffee we continued on, and I rounded the Lizard ignominiously on tow. I am so grateful to Peter and Emily Fabricius (RCC) for saving me hours of rowing and scary sailing.

They towed me nearly 15 miles from 0945-1230 to just off the Manacles Buoy. There we felt a westerly wind and I let them go. As I raised the sails, they sped off to the Helford River. I was then racing *Gas Pirate* and *Cassis* into Falmouth. I think I gave them a good run for their money until I had to reef. Even with two reefs, however, *Ramble* was still over-powered and I had to sail with one hand on the main sheet, ready to spill wind to relieve the helm.

I am very aware that in tough winds *Ramble* isn't as strong as her sister ships in the RCC. Our maiden voyage together was in F3-4 becoming F5 in Penryn when the tiller broke. That voyage, which rivals a storm in Biscay in a bigger boat for sheer toe-curling terror, taught me to respect the fragility of the thin piece of wood that is the tiller. I now keep the main sheet in my tiller hand, ready to let fly at a second's notice, and we did the six miles from the Manacles Buoy to Black Rock in 1½ hours.

The sea was flatter in Carrick Roads, but the wind was squallier and its direction varied widely, so there was no let up. *Sweet Briar* came storming towards me, looking magnificent (and intimidating) under full main, jib and mizzen. I just wished I had an extra hand to find my camera! I watched her take down her sails in an exemplary fashion, thinking I would go further up river before taking down mine. The wind was so squally, however, that I missed stays three times. I decided to give up trying to sail and used some of that wonderful petrol in my lovely engine!

As I took down the sails in the Falmouth Harbour entrance, the burgee halyard somehow got stuck in the main-track and the mainsail jammed. I had to jibe to free it. How peaceful it is when there are no sails flapping around! The engine started first pull. I puttered up the river, slowed down to chat with Jeremy and Aidri in *Cassis* on her mooring, and reached my own mooring at 1500. There was still enough time left to get everything, including me, off the boat and sorted before the tide left us.

While I was waiting for Colin to pick me up, I sat on the hard, surrounded by the detritus of my voyage, and fed oatcakes to the savage dog that lives there. Then I lay down on my oilskins like a piece of flotsam or jetsam, and could still feel the ground heaving. The wind kept rising, but I was safely back on land. In the evening I drank white wine and cassis, and toasted the yacht of that name together with new friends, the RCC and a successful voyage!