

Carry On Yotting

Miranda Delmar-Morgan



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Did you know that Arbroath has 30,000 to 40,000 creels offshore, depending on your local informant? Apparently the government dished out a load of grants. Some recipients bought creels, others, it is said, bought Range Rovers. Personally I wish they had all gone for the Range Rovers. We left Arbroath in very poor visibility (thick fog) much against my better judgement. I'm rather hoping my cruise director (husband, Edward) might pay more attention the next time I say I don't fancy going out in fog. We did find our way through the pots, which popped up alarmingly suddenly in the mere hundred metres of visibility. They diminished, we got lazy and relaxed. We ploughed on in lousy visibility but less vigilantly.

Unfortunately, what nobody told us was that there are also several thousand more pots off Gourdon to the north, about 8M south of Stonehaven. Suddenly amongst the monotonous rumbling of the engine there was the most mighty crunching and clanking beneath the hull, *Pelonia* slowed and wallowed to a halt in following seas. We peered over the aft end and could see a long line stretched out taut towards the sea bed. The other end was apparently firmly tethered to Pelonia's nether regions. 'Told you so' I thought to myself. Good of me not to say it out loud, wasn't it? But at times like these one can't afford to taunt one's crew, can one? They might just push one overboard, mightn't they? You can imagine the conversation in the court can't you? "Well, I've no idea what happened to her Your Honour, she must have lost her balance. I did my best but I just couldn't quite manage to pick her up. Besides, she'd been so rude." But I digress.

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I dashed below for the bread knife and ordered Edward onto the suddenly useful bathing platform. Slightly sheepishly, 'cos he knew perfectly well what three words were hovering on my lips, he leapt into action and managed to cut the line. We tried a bit of reverse, which didn't achieve very much, except perhaps to wind whatever was left down there a whole lot tighter to the propellor, or shaft or whatever else it could have got around...aaargh, like the rudder? I swung the wheel and was relieved to find that it seemed to be free. The water was a mere 9°C and there was a lumpy sea. Going over the side for a peek would be a bad idea, not that I often do that myself because I hate getting my hair wet and I am not a brilliant swimmer, so I usually beg Edward to do it. Anyway, given the conditions there was nothing for it but to carry on to Stonehaven and see what happened.



Pelonia in Tinker's Hole

We slowed to a sluggish 5kts from a chirpy 6.7kts so we knew we still had trouble. We could see the pot flag squirling about in the turbulence of our wake, beside the transom. The trouble is that Stonehaven doesn't have a lot of depth. We rang the harbour master who seemed to think we would be fine on the wall, at the outermost end. And he was probably correct. Unfortunately, about half an hour later, he rang and told us we would have to take the innermost ladder on the wall, as two other boats had just taken both of the outer ladders in the deeper water. So there we were, badly encumbered, going into a shallow, not particularly well protected harbour on a falling tide, with thick fog, towing a load of paraphernalia which would doubtless cause trouble as soon as we went astern.

We made it in, tied up almost into the corner of the outer harbour and wondered what on earth we could do. The tide started dropping and at some point, luckily beyond half tide we started feeling the bottom. This felt like firm sand and not very forgiving. It was nearing low water and approaching 2300. Whilst it wasn't catastrophic we really didn't want to be in that position for the following LW at around 1100 the following day which was due to be 0.3m less and therefore our situation would be 0.3m worse. I clambered aboard the rusty trawler astern of us and took some soundings with my lead line. Not much difference in depth and the trouble was that on the outermost harbour ladder was a green converted fishing

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boat. They had tied their dinghy firmly alongside to prevent people like us from rafting onto them. So, there we were in inadequate depth, nowhere else to berth and a load of nasty knitting around our prop. We were 35M from Peterhead where we might get help, on a falling tide, with no astern propulsion and forward propulsion greatly compromised. I woke at 0400 having barely slept a wink and having made a mental note that if we were to haul the boat aft then HW would be the best time to it, what with clambering up and down the ladder to consider.

As I gazed about I spotted some early morning fisherman preparing to go out. I trotted around the harbour sides to meet them.

"Is there a diver here?" I quizzed them.

"Why?" they asked.

"Cos I've got a lobster pot round the prop."

"Nae, nae, nae. Well, yes. That feller down there on that yacht is a diver but he's not allowed to dive in the harbour. What colour's the flag?"

What colour's the flag? Who cares what colour the flag is, I wonder, but, sensing danger, I kept a looming exasperation quiet. Besides I hadn't given its colour a great deal of attention. "I've no idea." I said. I realised they reckon they might know the owner and they're going to dob me in it with him and sue me for lost tackle.

"Anyway, do you think I could just anchor out here, (weak arm gesture at the harbour) off the wall? I'm grounding at low water."

"Nae, nae, nae, ya cannae do that. You need the Harbour Master's permission. Ya cannae be grounding over there, we never heard of that before."

"Oh. Well I can tell you I am grounding." I insisted.

"Nae," says one with a shake of his head, "I doubt it."

"Well, is he likely to be in today?" I persist.

"Who?"

"The Harbour Master." I reply. It has dawned on me that this isn't going very well and I am plainly appealing to entirely the wrong audience.

"Nae, nae, nae. It's a Bank Holiday today, he wilny be in."

"Oh" I said, thoroughly dismayed. "Well thank you so much for your helpful suggestions. It's been lovely to meet you." I said through gritted teeth as they cast off without a nod, leaving me crestfallen. Well fishermen just were never going to be sympathetic to some idiot yottie who has wiped out one of their chum's pots, were they? And marked with a flag at that? What kind of numpty goes around wiping out lobster pots that are properly marked with flags? A yottie numpty, obviously.

I plodded back to Edward, now about 0435 and astonishingly light. He had pumped up the dinghy and managed to extract the flag and half a mangled cane. Then he cut free two floats, each knotted inbetween like stringed pearls, and some major polypropylene cordage. This was looking a bit more promising. We desperately needed to get out of there, thick fog or not. Finally, having cut all he could reach and whilst we were still secured we put the engine into reverse. It stopped dead, always an alarming experience. Then we tried a little thrust ahead and hey

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The offending pot flag

presto, more cordage and floats appeared on the surface. We sent a prayer of thanks to my friend, Robin Rope Stripper, who designed this amazing scissor jawed set of teeth bolted onto the shaft. It had done its job. Gears both forward and astern now responded.

We thanked our lucky stars and fled into the relative safety of the aforementioned persistent thick fog at about 0500. *Pelonia* got back up to a relatively safe 6kts and was definitely

feeling free. Such a relief. We made it into Peterhead by midday-ish, had lunch and had to put ourselves to bed to recover from the stress.

The best part of this tale is that, in the face of further persistent fog Edward was quite content to stay put. We were obliged in any case, to remain in Peterhead to await a parcel of Shetland charts which I had forgotten to bring and which a daughter had posted from Hampshire. These took several days to arrive. So the fog was quite welcome in that it doubled the argument for staying where we were. Rachael had extracted a promise from our local post office that we would receive them in 24 hours. The trouble was that this was blatantly untrue.

So here is a little tip ... if you want something to arrive in 24 hours then whatever you do, don't rush it to your post office on a Saturday morning thinking it will arrive neatly at its destination on the Monday because I can almost guarantee that it won't, so you needn't rush at all. The reason it won't arrive like magic on Monday, despite your best efforts, is because Parcel Force does not collect on Saturdays. Quite why our local PO recommended Parcel Force to Rachael as the best option escapes us, except that the charts were heavy and perhaps the PO thought they were doing us all a favour. The upshot of this was that our charts remained in our Hampshire post office until at least Monday afternoon and when they did make it north of the border they apparently languished in an Aberdonian depot for another couple of days. They eventually arrived on Thursday afternoon, kindly collected by the marina manager. By this time the fog had lifted and we could finally carry on yotting. Hurray.