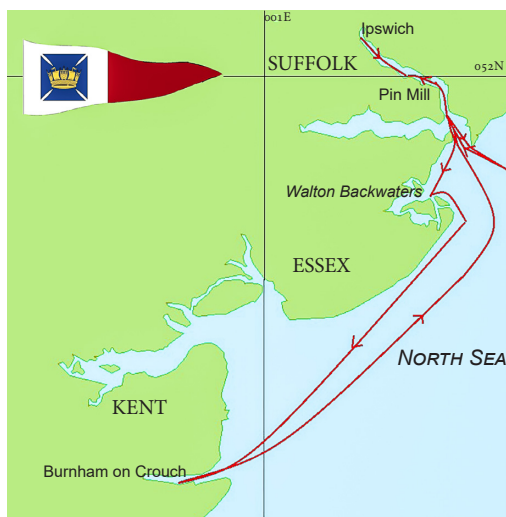


An East Coast Adventure

The Pre-Cadet Cruise

Will Eaton with Jack Rodriguez



The Club has delighted in encouraging children into sailing with the fantastic Swallows and Amazons each year giving them the adventure of sailing in small boats with other children, being set free to explore their sailing passions. However, up to this point there was little besides sailing with family to encourage them to progress into sailing larger yachts independently. I'm sure we can all remember the first sail without our parents!

The trip was thought up a few years ago (as with many trips, a pandemic got in the way) and,

after the recommendation from Jane Russell, Katharine Ingram arranged for Offshore Adventures, a charity based in Ipswich, to take a group of 13-18 year olds for a five day exploration of the Suffolk and Essex shores. Accompanied by two RCC cadets, Henry Pearson and myself, Will Eaton, the group would be encouraged to take command of the charity's two Oyster 49's, *Ocean Scout* and *Offshore Scout*, plan coastal passages and

Offshore Scout alongside *Ocean Scout*, both Oyster 49s



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experience the magic of sailing at night. Offshore Adventures provided a skipper and two mates for each yacht.

The cadets and pre-cadets, some of whom were new to the Club, were split between the two yachts as follows:

Ocean Scout: Henry Pearson (Cadet), Robert Ingram, Charlotte Ingram, Jack Rodriguez, James Rodriguez, Jacob Southby-Tailyour, Heather Southby-Tailyour.

Offshore Scout: Will Eaton (Cadet), Hamish Pimm, Dai Yamagishi, Emily Eaton (no relation to Will!), Clara Wakeford, Bella Wakeford, Ollie Groslin, Seb Groslin, Bamber Mauleverer



Skipper Freddie briefs the crew of *Offshore Scout*

Ipswich to Harwich – Will Eaton (*Offshore Scout*)

The crew of *Offshore Scout* assembled on Sunday evening, the boat's skipper Freddie introduced first mate Harrison and second mate Emily (all of whom were in their mid-20's), gave a briefing for the week's activities, a run-down of the boat and sent us to unpack in one of the 12 bunks on board. With my father's Oyster 485 *Wild Goose* sleeping half as many and being a very similar size, I was intrigued to see which part of the bilge we would be staying in! The charity had in fact owned the boats since new in the late 1990s and had completed the entire interior fit out themselves. This made them very well designed as a sail training vessel and meant that even with 12 on board there was space to sleep and always a job that needed several pairs of hands.

Cooking for that number would require some thought even in a kitchen that has a full sized hob and oven; but the menu was perfectly simple and well thought out so no one would go hungry (except perhaps Dai who had an incredible appetite). The saloon offered two pilot berths as well as a large fold-out table to seat all the crew.

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For the first night we had a round of hotdogs, which meant chopping six onions for caramelising, of course - no half measures.

Freddie navigated us down the Orwell that evening to Pin Mill where we tied alongside *Ocean Scout*. Insistent on getting a line onto the buoy rather than its pennant, Freddie attempted to move both boats in tandem so that I could get a line around. However, the tide was running a little hard and the topsides a little too high so we settled on a few extra lines made off to *Ocean Scout* hoping they were held fast.

The morning of day two, half the crew woke nice and early to begin the breakfast preparations; we were told it takes over an hour to cook sausages for 12. They weren't wrong. We were only slightly late getting ready and sausages fuelled our planned journey around Roughs Tower (or the Principality of Sealand as you may know it), a WWII installation from 1942 to protect the Thames Estuary and now a self proclaimed independent state. Although the residents had their front door open they didn't respond to our sound signal.

The aftermath of a mud/rust fight after hoisting the chain by hand



Sunrise at Pin Mill

We made our way into Shotley Marina where the crew brushed up after a shower (or a bath if you managed to find it as I did) and Hamish, Bella and Clara whipped up some spaghetti Bolognese. There were some concerned looks, Clara produced the potato masher, but this was quickly returned to the drawer.

The two Oysters are identical ketches

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Foredeck crew fresh from a North Sea dunking weren't far out of Felixstowe when we realised we were running low on fresh milk. Freddie, as skipper, decided a day of UHT milk was a stretch too far and radioed *Ocean Scout* for an urgent milk transfer, fixing the bottle to a fender for us to recover. We couldn't spend the day drinking tea without fresh milk!

Freddie introduced us all to his various man overboard techniques. Whilst working through these drills we had tuned into a Mayday relay from Dover Coastguard, notifying us of people in the water in the not too distant Sunk TSS. We agreed it was too far for us to be of assistance and we made our way into Halfpenny Pier, Harwich where Freddie wracked his

offering a good variety of sail plans, including a yankee, staysail, mizzen, main, mizzen staysail and a suit of storm sails. The next morning we set for the Walton Backwaters, and hoisted the yankee and main. The boats are set up for all sail changes to be done without much mechanical assistance, with all work done from the mast or foredeck requiring at least three crew. The group worked together to hank on the foresail for hoisting, hauling up the main and winching in and tailing the reefing lines under the instruction of first mate Harrison.

The trouble with a hank-on sail is there is no option other than to get wet when the skipper calls for a sail change, so Dai, Emily and I spent around half an hour getting showered by the North Sea in F5 as we hoisted the staysail. We

Keeping a watch for a potential man overboard



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brains as to the top sites to see. His list of recommendations was a little short and we settled on searching for the recent work thought to be by graffiti artist Banksy and finding an ice cream; after all it was still British Summer Time and we were having a relatively early night before our passage to Burnham-on-Crouch the next morning against both wind and tide.

The passage to Burnham-on-Crouch – Jack Rodriguez (*Ocean Scout*)

After a cosy night in Harwich, saddened by thoughts of the nearby death of a refugee off the coast lurking in the background (we had heard the Mayday for this the previous day), we broke free of our rafting partner and ventured out East towards the mammoth wind farm impressively lit up and quite a sight at night. Having personally never been so close to a wind farm, it was quite an experience. As we journeyed closer to the mesmerising turbines, the true size began to dawn on us and the overwhelming power of this incredible machinery became apparent. Despite our awe, we quickly realised we were slightly too snug to the blades and made a much appreciated tack.

As darkness settled down, light sequences became the topic of discussion as lateral buoys marked our entrance in, complicated by a presumed dead port lateral halfway down the river. Yet, in the distance came another light. Unbeknownst to the crew or the skipper, a local firework show was taking place on the shoreline which acted (in my opinion) as our welcoming parade with moonlit water shimmering beneath us and the skyline lit up above. This created a warm feeling after the day's sail to encourage us on with our moonlit buoy hopping until we eventually reached our marina for the night.

A lesson on passage planning by first mate Harrison

The return journey – Will Eaton (*Offshore Scout*)

At the beginning of the trip the two crews had been keen to have a night sail and it was decided that the return to the Orwell was the best opportunity. One bonus, a lie-in and a day ashore allowing almost everyone



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to explore the town and make a trip to the nearest shop or café. During this time, Robert Ingram and Jack Rodriguez planned the night passage and pilotage for *Ocean Scout* whilst the rest of the crew sought out local cafes or shops for some reprovisioning. Similar divisions of effort and eating took place on *Ocean Scout*.

After an early supper the two boats left in tandem. The slight differences in passage plans quickly became apparent as *Ocean Scout* took a line slightly closer to the Gunfleet wind turbines, impressively lit up and quite a sight at night. We began a two on/two off watch system between us; although the excitement of sailing at night was clearly so much for some that they stayed up all night. All crew kept a great lookout, learning their westerly cardinals from their wind farms and their safe water marks from starboard hand channel markers. As some began to tire after a few watches changed, skipper Freddie began an enthralling discussion of the top hits by pop artist Taylor Swift, followed by rousing renditions supported by the entire crew.

As we approached the port of Felixstowe shortly after midnight, Freddie spotted some traffic approaching from above the buildings which were round the corner on the River Stour. At the same moment *Ocean Scout*, slightly ahead of us, was hailed by Harwich VTS enquiring as to their intentions. They must have been busy singing or spotting lights, so Freddie responded on their behalf conveniently muffling the boat name *Offshore Scout* so VTS might not notice. They cottoned on quickly and allowed *Ocean Scout* to continue, whilst we were asked to wait before the Stour Guard PHM to allow the traffic to pass. There were three ships on the

Ollie whipping up some butter.



move and Felixstowe lived up to its reputation as the largest port for containerised shipping in the UK. We passed the port and anchored on the Orwell, keeping an anchor watch as the wind was quite gusty.

Some provisions always run low towards the end of a trip and there was a threat of no butter for the final breakfast. However, adaptive as always Freddie suggested that we make some for ourselves with leftover cream. Earlier in the week Ollie had made some excellent whipped cream, so he was tasked to it. Amazingly, and after only 10 minutes of shaking, the butter was ready and order was

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restored. The final sail back up river allowed the crew to reflect on the week and what they had learnt. Despite the drips of condensation at night in the cabin and the endless beating into the Crouch which made some a little queasy, unanimously everyone agreed it had been a great time, noting the excellent team from Offshore Adventures, the plentiful food offerings and experiencing the joys of sailing with new found friends of the same age.

Thanks must go to the team at Offshore Adventures. Both boats had a wealth of experience on board and everyone learnt a lot about sailing these unique boats. The recommendation from Jane Russell RCC was an excellent one. Finally thanks must also go to Katharine Ingram, who organised such a great cruise for the pre-cadet aged kids.

