

## Memory Lane and Wonderful Walks

This year Kate & I decided to sail to the place where I had been brought up, and in which I hadn't sailed since the late eighties when a friend and I kept our 505 dinghy there, until it was buried under several others and written off in the storm of October 1987. We also planned on plenty of walking, as a good way to balance the relative inactivity when aboard and give ourselves some aerobic exercise.

We left Portland in mid-May on a sunny afternoon with a sea breeze springing up and the tide turning fair, and had a gentle spinnaker run down to Mupe passing Olympic dinghies competing in the European Championships.



The views as ever from here were breathtaking, and as the sun set the water turned red (below), with the sound of the waves breaking on the rocks and the shore around us on three sides magical.

The following morning saw us up early to catch the tide and a stiff northerly breeze, which drove us past St Albans within an hour of leaving. A little later, just past Durlston, the GPS suggested one hour twenty to the Needles!

But with both the tide and wind easing and the latter veering we found ourselves beating gently up the Needles channel in about 5 knots of wind, with the tide sweeping us towards Yarmouth where we were allocated a nice berth without difficulty.

The timing of this sail was perhaps lucky, as we learned when we arrived that the previous day an RN bomb disposal team had put a two mile exclusion zone around the Needles while they carried out a controlled explosion of a 7ft long, 2000lb unexploded mine from WWII which had been dredged up by a fishing boat – see below.



Each time we visit Yarmouth we become fonder of it. The beautiful town and harbour, its location as the first port you come to in the western Solent and the warm welcome from the harbour staff make it a real haven, particularly if you have come some way or through rough weather.

The quality of the locally produced food you can buy in the town, and the walks and cycling in West Wight – in our view the prettiest part of the Island – also make it a wonderful place to stay.

On this occasion we decided to walk up Tennyson Down, on the south side of the island between Freshwater Bay and the Needles. The monument to Tennyson on the top of the hill can be seen as you walk along the Yar (top left in the picture below), and as you ascend from Freshwater Bay you



find spectacular views opening up of the south coast of the Island to St. Catherine's, as well as walking amongst lovely fauna (next page).

As you get nearer to the monument you can look west along the cliffs to Anvil Point (see next pic), and then when walking back down looking north you can see from Poole right down the Solent towards Portsmouth, including Hurst somewhere in the middle (final picture of this trio).

If you have not done this walk yet we would recommend it to you, as we consider it one of the most spectacular we have done.









Our next stop, Chichester Harbour, was also our destination in that I grew up in Old Bosham located at the top of one of the arms of the harbour.

For those that have not been there, the entrance to the harbour can be exciting with a narrow channel along the beach at Hayling Island, shifting sands often showing within about 20m of the channel and a bar that is not unlike Salcombe. Pilot advice is similarly not to attempt an entrance in a strong south-westerly and ebb tide.

While in the harbour we could not help reflecting on what a contrast it was to Portland. Unlike the deep water, limited tidal range, space and proximity to open sea at Portland, Chichester is characterised by narrow channels, lots of mud, a high tidal range (c 5m at springs) leading to strong tides in the harbour, and many boats often moored in the narrow channels. It can also be a long way to the harbour entrance – up to five or so miles for many.

So while at Portland we seek to prevent or limit sailing boat movement through our moorings, many of the sailing clubs in Chichester are located well up the harbour and so sailing (and racing!) through moorings is an essential and regular activity.

Having had a run down the Solent with a fair tide, we dropped the spinnaker near the bar beacon and turned north past Hayling, gybing past the sandbanks as we made our way up to Itchenor. We then turned into the Bosham reach, inevitably with the brisk prevailing wind dead behind as we approached the village, and as we ran quickly between the moored boats - always aware of a possible gybe - there was little time for photos. Kate did manage to get one (below), and the sharp eyed may notice Bosham church in the distance beneath the clew of the genoa, as well as the nice little blue half-tonner to port!



Old Bosham is a place steeped in history. It features in the Bayeux tapestry following Harold's departure for Normandy from here, and it is said this is the place where King Canute famously ordered the tide to retreat. His daughter is believed to be buried in the lovely Saxon church, which is worth a visit.

More recently it was a fishing village and following that the main source of employment when I was growing up was boatbuilding. Now it is principally London weekend territory, with over 60% of houses being second homes.

Unfortunately there are no visitors' facilities here, other than the Quay near the church which completely dries out each tide. So as the depth dropped we turned round to make our way back to Itchenor, with Kate valiantly winching as we short-tacked back up the river. This brought back memories for me, and I thought my late dad - who had a boat moored for several years near where the above picture was taken - may have been smiling! It meant Kate was well exercised by the time we turned downwind again heading for Chichester Marina.

This marina is located about five miles from the harbour entrance, and is large. Created in the sixties by effectively damming a natural lagoon, it houses over a thousand boats all of which have to lock in and out when entering or departing. We were told surveys have shown that most don't bother!

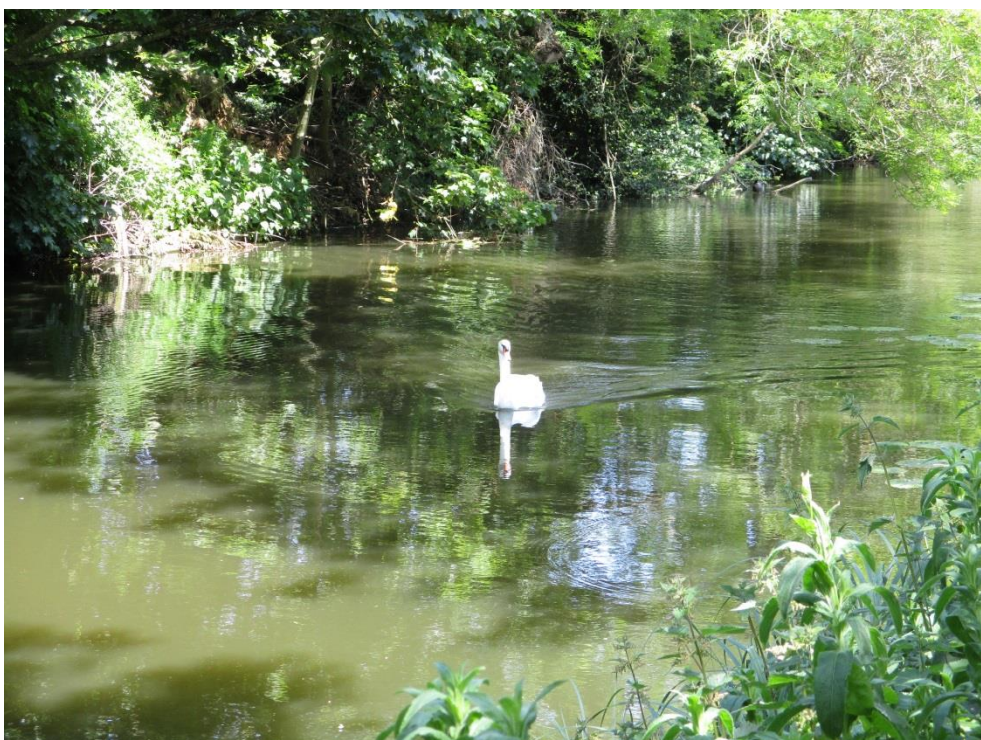
Approaching the marina entrance the harbour virtually dries out, as below, and so careful calculation of tide and depth is essential. Once in the marina a depth of 2.2m or more is maintained.





Finding an Aston Martin parked near the pontoon walkway ashore is no problem, but food and chandlery is more difficult! There are no shops onsite in this regard, and so we decided on a walk to Chichester, a lovely Roman city with a cathedral not unlike Salisbury.

We chose to do this by taking the Chichester canal, originally part of a waterway linking London to Portsmouth which is now home to wildlife as well as being used for leisure purposes. This was not a direct route, but a very pretty one and hopefully the pictures below show this.







This heron seemed very relaxed at us being on the path, just keeping a close, quizzical eye on us. I guess there are plenty of passers-by.





On arriving in Chichester we had lunch in the cathedral café and then took a look around the Bishop's Palace gardens. These are open to the public, free of charge, maintained by the council and are well worth a visit. In May there were many blooms, and the setting in lovely old brick and flint walls with the cathedral behind was stunning. We have tried to capture this in the picture below.

Apart from the cathedral and gardens the city is well known for its theatre, and there is a circular walk on the Roman walls that you can do. After our walk from the marina, however, we just did our shopping, had a cup of tea and caught the bus back – very quick and dropped us just outside the marina entrance.





Once back at the marina we had our supper time visit from a family of swans, with one of the cygnets riding in Mum which we had never seen before.





While we were here we were visited by some family and friends who live nearby, and we went for lunch at the Chichester Yacht Club which is situated near the marina entrance with wonderful views down the harbour. Their food was splendid and their service was offered with their own particular style, as in the two photos below.



During our lunch on the late May bank holiday Monday, when boats were continually returning after the long weekend, we witnessed out of the window boat after boat going aground on the approach to the marina, as in the picture below.



This suggested to us that the dredging claims made were on the optimistic side, and we deferred our departure until the high tide the next morning, going for a walk up the harbour to Dell Quay instead.

Dell Quay is a lovely spot, with a nice pub on the water where in my student days I used to work behind the bar, and leads up to Fishbourne at the top of the reach where the Roman Palace – Britain’s largest residential Roman building – was built following the Romans landing here around 75 AD.

Our walk coincided with high tide, when dinghy racing occurs as in the picture below, which was taken looking north, with the South Downs and Goodwood in the background. At low tide there would be virtually no water at all in this picture.





We left the marina early on a cold and damp morning, beating our way out of the harbour and up the Solent. When we found ourselves near Ryde Sands memories of the Round the Island came flooding back, but with a fair tide this time we were able to do a long tack to Stokes Bay and then a final one which took us to Cowes.

Here we tied up in the East Cowes marina, and shortly after having tidied everything away we noticed our treasurer, Alan, and Pat on a pontoon opposite. They looked as though they needed a drink and we invited them over, learning that they had just had a great downwind sail from Portland.

They kindly reciprocated later opening up the Jean Clair bar! Talk about travelling in style!



A beat down the Solent saw us overnighing in Yarmouth which coincided with a gaffers regatta (below), but despite this we had no problem in getting a berth. We've concluded that May is probably the best time to visit the Solent, benefiting often from good weather, few people out on the water and berths available from those that have departed on longer voyages.



Due to a forecast for light southerly winds the next day, we set off prepared for a gentle sea-breeze reach home with a large genoa, but after drifting about a bit with fair tide a solid NE F4 sprung up and with our large spinnaker it took only two hours from St Albans to be back in Portland harbour.

We've found that two days of consecutive sailing, even short hops, seems to take it out of us these days, and so after packing up we gratefully settled down with a drink and spent the night on board before offloading our gear the next day. As we sipped our drinks we reflected on what a lovely trip it had been, and just how much Portland has to offer as a place to keep a boat.