

Wight and Back

Blue Danube's summer cruise for 2010 took place early August in the expectation that the height of summer would offer us the best of the weather together with an opportunity to take our teenage crew on a slightly different adventure. With a passage plan to leave Brightlingsea on Sunday the 1st August so that we could attend the club rally on the Saturday we made preparations. In fact as we were host boat for the rally we spent more time in the few days prior to departure organising for the gathering at the rally rather than the cruise. Linda managed to get an extra day off on the Friday, which was just as well as there was still the packing to be done and we had to meet Brandon and Sarah at waterside that evening to get everyone aboard.

After some last minute changes, ifs and buts, worries about weather etc a healthy cluster of BQYC boats turned up for the rally on the Saturday. Which was just as well as we needed to off load the nibbles etc as our cruise was to get underway the following day. We arranged to raft off to accommodate an early departure in the hope of avoiding disturbing to many crews the next morning, so apologies to those who could not come aboard. The rally proved to be a success as usual, with even the weather playing its part as things began to brighten up. Forecasts suggested the possibility of favourable conditions the next day, but with the unsettled pattern of lows we had been experiencing it wasn't possible to be entirely confident. With the club on board the engine seacock was closed to keep pressure of the system as a precaution to avoid any last minute problems.

Having enjoyed the company most crews went seemed to opt to go ashore for supper at the Indian restaurant, which apparently comes highly recommended. However we decided fish and chips and the Colne clubhouse was more suited to our preparations. We took last orders in the chippy and walked round to the club where we were invited to use their new balcony. Naturally we were later back to the boat than intended but had enjoyed a pleasant evening, so it was straight to bed having checked the weather again, as we were leaving on the tide at 4am in the morning. With a 3.30 alarm for a final check of the forecast on the laptop it was soon time to be up and get underway. With apologies to the surrounding boats, we did try to keep it quiet, in fact it was just the skipper who cast of lines and pushed off in the dark. As we slipped out through the moorings a thought suddenly came to mind, hell the seacock! Wonderful start. However we were soon in the Colne enjoying a very pleasant reach out towards the Spitway. At this point Brandon appeared trying to keep his promise to help out. Good effort, but he was soon back in his bunk, as it was just coming on for dawn. The sun rose into a beautiful if ominously red sky as we motor sailed into the Spitway in an attempt to chase the tide, which was already running an hour ahead of us. We need everything in our favour if we were going to make Dover with a fair tide. Linda surfaced at about this time so at least we could enjoy get the day underway.

As we eased sheets to headed towards the Barrow 2 we passed close to the wind farm on our port side. Quite a sight in the early light then suddenly there was an almighty bang; knocking the engine out of gear I just caught sight of a fender as it disappeared astern. It was tethered to something in deep water so we had been lucky as it had not been seen and was certainly not expected in mid channel. With no damage done we pushed on for the Sunken Sands determined to keep a sharper. The tide had already turned by the time we crossed the Sunk into Black Deep. With a minimum of 2.5m

under the keel there was no problem with the crossing of the sands and we were soon on our way to Fulgers Gat. Our cruise was underway as we left home waters destined for the Isle of Wight.

The sun had disappeared long ago to be replaced by sheets of grey cloud so we settled in to cross the Thames estuary reaching and motor sailing as the wind fluctuated between F2 and 4. Gradually the light improved and we had some sunshine by the time the teenage crew arrived on deck. With breakfast now an early lunch we were soon dodging around shipping as they moved into the Thames from the Margate roads anchorage. So standing off slightly to avoid being drawn into the estuary we headed past North Foreland towards Ramsgate. Once past the headland we still had favourable tide so Blue Danube romped on as we discussed the virtues of stopping at Ramsgate or pushing on to Dover. Linda is not a fan of Ramsgate as it is always rough when we get there so it didn't take too much persuasion to agree to push on to Dover. In the meantime the weather began to closing in with shower clouds building over South Foreland, however it was only midday. So we headed into the Gulf Stream to cut through the Goodwin Sands across the bay. Now the wind increased and came from ahead creating wind over tide conditions and then it rained. Great!



Still the tide rushes across the sands giving a very positive if lumpy lift to the white cliff and around the South Foreland into the Dover straight. With Dover's eastern entrance in sight we could see just how busy the port could be, ferries and other ships constantly on the move in and out of the harbour, it looked as though we would have to go round to the western side to gain access to the marina. We

pushed on until within about 500 meters of the entrance and then spoke to harbour control, who to our surprise suggested that we continued our approach, just let the ferry out and you can come straight in Sir. Wonderful. Passing across the outer harbour we were soon in the marina well place to leave the following morning.

Sunday afternoon in Dover was a bit of a throw back to childhood holidays. Boring, with everything shut. So we headed to the beachfront at least an ice cream and a look at the boats would be entertaining. In fact we found a very nice leisure centre with restaurant bar overlooking the harbour. Would have been nice as it was quite windy by now, unfortunately they closed just as we were about to sit in one of their very nice leather settees with view out to sea. Never mind the ice cream stall on the front was open. Actually they have spent quite a bit of money developing the promenade and with a white cliff downs effect in the paving it's going to be quite attractive when finished.

Next morning up at 4am, checked weather and rather surprised to find we could go. F3/4 Increasing 5 later SW. Ok- not best direction but at least we could move on. Just had to hope later proved to be correct as the ambition was to make Brighton. This plan left Eastbourne as an option if the crew were having a hard time, but either way it was going to be a long day. Once ready to leave we found that the fuel dock in Dover opens at 5am, so we stopped to top up as this could prove to be a daylong motoring. The early start was needed to take an adverse tide at first in order to get out of the harbour and make some headway toward Dungeness as the tide became favourable. Once at Dungeness we should then gain a second favourable tide to see us on to



Brighton. This all worked out well although we had to motor sail to keep the boat moving. We passed close in to Dungeness avoiding the pots and were in good time to pick up the tide to take us across the bay to the Sovereign light and then on Beachy Head. As promised the wind pickup just as the tide turned against us when passing under the cliffs of the South Downs, so we had an exciting

beat for the last hour or so. It was nice to get into Brighton as it meant we had arrived and our holiday could start. Ok next day we had to push on round Selsey Bill though the Looe channel and make for Chichester, but at least we could have a lay in, as we didn't need to leave until 8am. The plan was to meet up with Chris and Sheila Dyer on April Fool on Tuesday afternoon, as they were leaving Portsmouth with the same destination in mind. Again the laptop weather reports were good although the F3/4 would continue to be adverse and would again build later in the day. So after a respectable breakfast in harbour for a change we set off with a small cluster of other boats. At least this suggested we had the tide right. However it wasn't long before we were on our own again motor sailing into the wind. The Looe channel is quite straight forward for an east coast boat, being wide, deep and reasonably well marked, although you have to be a little patient before the buoys that mark the narrower exit point on the island side (West) of the bill come into view. The chart plotter is a real boon for these shallower water moments. Whilst I suspect the channel could be an unpleasant spot in a blow there were no problems today as we made good time, and were soon turning in towards Chichester. The river entrance is set well back into the bay and is low lying with shallow banks on either side. So just like home. It's quite a narrow entrance over the bar, although well marked, so you need to keep to the channel as it shallows quickly on either side. Once in turn to starboard and move up river were the rows on mooring lead all the way to Chichester Harbour. The river at this point is just one big boat park. We arrived just ahead of Chris and Shelia so the short wait for the lock was no problem, as soon both boats were secure in the enormous marina. Now we had really arrived and both boats would enter the Solent tomorrow as we headed for the island.

We spent the rest of the week and early part of the second cruising the Solent and Isle of Wight in company visiting a few of the hot spots. We even managed to visit Cowes on the tail end of the sailing week, which was quite a surprise. Yarmouth harbour was our furthest west location in our two week break. However this did mean an early departure in the second week after spending a couple of nights in Gosport so



that we could visit Portsmouth historic naval dockyards. This offered an excellent opportunity to torment the teenage crew with some history and culture. Mind you we relented a bit in the late afternoon and toured the shops beneath the millennium spinnaker tower. This modern landmark dominates the Solent.

For the return we reverted to the early departures, leaving Portsmouth in the dark to head back via Eastbourne and Ramsgate. Making it back to Bradwell on schedule, but that's another story.