



Cobbs Quay Berth Holders Association.

First Time Channel Crossers Cruise **21st – 23rd April 2007.**

So when did it all start, this fascination with boating? I was about 5 years old and visiting a harbour (Lymington I think) with my family on one of the earliest holidays I can remember. From that point on I have always wanted to be out on that big blue mass of water exploring it. A lack of funds, mortgages and children prevented this from being developed into anything more than a children's inflatable dinghy until 2000 when I had saved enough to buy my first 21' sports boat. It was a very practical boat for a family with three small children, having a 5-litre V8 engine that would propel it at speeds of nearly 50mph! After several years of day boating from Christchurch, which included adventures to the Isle of Wight and Poole, it was becoming clear that my 3-year-old daughter was developing some sort of phobia. Every time the straight through exhausts growled into life she would burst into tears. Alison my long suffering wife agreed that we should make the move to something bigger, or better still I should take up golf! A Sealine F33 was acquired and kept for three years. We spent many happy family days in and around Poole, but always returning to the marina at night. The urge to go further and on a bigger, better boat finally took over and in December 2005 I took delivery of my pride and joy "BONGO" a new Sealine S38.

During a frustrating 2006 when the boat seemed to permanently have something wrong with it, we joined the Cobbs Quay Berth Holders Association. Two cruises to the Hamble And The Isle Of Wight were undertaken. We found that everyone we met was very friendly, the committee members particularly so. On both trips we had mechanical problems, but with the help of various people with far greater experience than ourselves we made it back to Cobbs Quay safely. Knowing that this was one of the strengths of cruising in company, I knew that somehow I had to convince Alison that we should go for the "big" one. A trip across to France. I am not sure how I managed it, particularly as the boat spent much of the winter back at the factory having various warranty issues resolved. Various attempts to persuade me that golf really would be a better hobby were undertaken, but there we were, 8pm, 20th April 2007 attending the skippers briefing outside the marina office.

The winter had been spent getting the relevant equipment and charts etc together, and we were as ready as we would ever be. Kevin our leader briefed the skippers of the 12 or so boats on the plans for the following day. Linda his wife issued everyone with leaflets about Cherbourg, which included town plans and restaurant lists. This typifies the incredible organisation that Kevin and Linda put into the cruises with just about everything you can imagine being thought of. The forecast was OK but not perfect. Yes it was going to be sunny. Yes, it was going to be unbelievably warm for the time

of year. The winds were forecast force 3 to 4. But that horrible word “moderate” appeared on every forecast I could find when describing the sea state. Kevin had seen the same and told everyone that we should listen to channel 6 in the morning in case things looked too rough. Was I worried? Slightly.

Saturday arrived and around 9:30am a rumour spread down C pontoon that conditions were not good. A large Sunseeker had made its way from Torquay the previous day and had a very rough trip. Another Cobbs berth holder had had to turn back when on a delivery trip to Guernsey. At this particular moment (9.36am Saturday 21st April) Golf would definitely have been the preferred option! However our safety boat “Girl Fisher” had departed at 7:30am with two slower boats and was reporting that whilst a little lumpy, things were generally OK. Anyway, why should we be worried? We had one of the biggest boats on the trip. One was only 24’ long!

We left the marina and headed through the 10:30am bridge. Radio checks were carried out and everyone was loud and clear. I felt a strange feeling. I am not sure if it was nervousness or excitement, but it was definitely strange! Unfortunately things did not start well. “Lamados” a Sealine F33 managed to collect a rope around its propeller close to the harbour entrance. The rest of the group waited in Studland bay while attempts to free it took place. Things then got even worse for poor “Lamados” as the boat became firmly stuck on a sandbar. After a short while the crew of “Lamados” told the rest of the fleet to leave without them, as things were not looking good. Reluctantly this we did.

Kevin took the lead as usual and we settled into a nice steady cruise of around 18 knots. “Lumpy” was a good description. Not rough, not smooth but “Lumpy”. All boats jostled around a little trying to find a slightly smoother route. However, the waves always seemed slightly smaller somewhere else.



At this point I noticed that “Idle Eyes” a Sealine S24 was spending more time out of the water than in! For some reason best known to themselves the crew did not seem

to mind. They tucked into Bongo's wake and we tried to smooth the way as best we could, but I knew which boat I would rather be in. Peter in "Work of Art", buzzed around with Anne hanging precariously out the back snapping away with her camera. Life was good, but "Lumpy".

Finally the chart plotter beeped and we had arrived mid channel. This was a strange feeling in itself. We had arrived somewhere but there was nothing there. No island, no pub, no picnic benches, no toilet block, just water in every direction as far as you could see. A five minute comfort break then ensued although it was actually not comfortable at all, especially when beam on! So without delay and with everyone ready we set off for the second half of the trip.

Seventeen miles out disaster struck. "Reality" suddenly slowed. Kevin radioed the rest of the group saying that he had picked up a strange vibration. Everyone came back and circled the stricken vessel. After investigation Kevin found he had hit something just below the surface and damaged a prop quite badly. He could still continue but at only 10 knots. It was decided that the rest of the main group should continue and Kevin would follow, but make sure he was in radio contact. This we did, but it felt wrong. In only a few hours we had developed a feeling of comradeship with people we hardly knew and leaving someone behind did not feel good. About 10 miles from Cherbourg the group split into two. I lead a group of three boats in one direction and "Got Lucky" started to move in a slightly different direction. Why was this? We cannot both be right! I am sure we both felt the same way. "He must know what he's doing, I must have got it wrong" After several miles and with the gap growing wider radio contact was made. We were both heading for Cherbourg but totally different ends of the outer wall which guards the Grand Rade! An exchange of coordinates later and the group reformed into one.

Around four and half hours after leaving Cobbs we arrived in Cherbourg. "Girl Fisher" guided us in and explained where we were to berth. Clive helped with the ropes and that was it. Time to relax. The contents of every locker were picked up off the floor shortly after opening them, and for some reason I was having trouble standing still. Even the harbour wall felt "Lumpy"! An invitation for drinks on "Girl Fisher" was accepted and thankfully after a short while Kevin arrived in "Reality". I am not sure if Kevin was ever in the Scouts, but I am sure he would have been a good one, as he promptly produced a spare prop from his boat and in true cruising in company spirit around a dozen jolly chaps sat on the front of his boat so that the stern lifted enough to enable the change. It was at this moment that I suddenly realised that we had made it across the channel for the first time. We had covered 72.8 miles, without Bongo developing a problem. This really was a reason to celebrate, so we did for most of the evening on the back of "Millers Folly", where we made several new friends.

Sunday was a glorious day. The weather for April was incredible, with shorts, T shirts and bikini's the most appropriate attire. We ventured into Cherbourg, which

was very quiet and explored for a few hours. Lunch involved a nice bottle of Chablis and two baguettes. The afternoon was one of the most relaxing you can have. Full sun, no wind, and doing nothing!

In the evening, Kevin organised a meal for everyone at the yacht club, which was good value and good fun. We again sat with new friends and generally chatted and enjoyed ourselves all evening. Kevin made a short speech and explained to everyone the plans for the next day.

However it had not gone unnoticed that dense fog was rolling in to the harbour. Would it be there in the morning? What would we do? Can I really use my radar? Would a large container ship see me, or would we be the subject of an investigation at some point in the future? I kept these worries to myself, as I could sense the golf conversation starting again!



The CQBHA mingling with the locals!

Monday morning was spent relaxing, stocking up with duty free and baguettes and carrying out checks around the boat. The fog had lifted and visibility was around 3 miles. We had another pleasant lunch and after paying the harbour master for our stay (only 39 euros) we were ready for the return leg. There were two boats less on the return leg. One had had to return unplanned on Sunday and another was staying in Cherbourg for the year. “Girl Fisher” left an hour earlier with a slightly slower boat and the rest of the group left at 2:30pm. Thankfully the seas were much smoother and we could easily keep up a good 22 knots.

We had arranged for “Idle Eyes” to follow us again, so that she could benefit from our smoothing wake, and we were soon at the mid way point.



After another comfort break, we set off on the final leg. Ten miles out I noticed a buoy on my starboard side and radioed “Work of Art” to warn them. As we were almost level with it I noticed a long length of orange rope that was attached to it. Worse still we were just about to go over it at 22 knots! I slammed the throttles into neutral, and for a moment thought that “Idle Eyes” was going to join us in the cockpit, but they skilfully avoided us. However we were firmly attached to a nice thick orange rope that was hooked nicely around the starboard prop. The group stopped and returned to support us. Whilst smoother seas than on the way out, the boat was still rolling when at rest. I found this out when I went onto the bathing platform and came as close as you can to falling off without actually doing so! I quickly decided to attach myself with a safety harness. I managed to hook the rope with a boat hook, but could not shift it. Out came the knife, which clearly scared the rope, as I was just about to set to work when suddenly the rope simply drifted free. After a careful inspection I could see no damage so off we set. Knocking the power off with a split second to spare probably prevented a difficult situation being a lot worse. Again, what was a wonderful feeling was that whilst I had a problem I was not on my own. On the radio I could hear that “Girl Fisher” was only a couple of miles in front and had immediately turned around to come back and help us. The other cruise members were all standing by to help if they could.



Off we shot again for the final few miles. But where was Poole? It was on the chart plotter and radar but nowhere to be seen. As we approached it became clear that the harbour and approaches were enveloped in a thick mist. As we passed the chain ferry at around 5pm various radio chatter took place, all based around what to do for the hour and a half until the bridge lifted. Suddenly “Girl Fisher” notified the group that there was to be a commercial bridge lift at 5:30pm and after Kevin contacted the harbour control we were given permission to follow a large barge through the bridge as long as we were quick. This we were and by 5:45 everyone was safely back in their berths at Cobbs.



To anyone thinking of joining the berth holders association and taking part in a trip, I cannot recommend it strongly enough. The atmosphere is great. The company enjoyable, and the trips thoroughly memorable. We have learned so much on the cruises that we have taken part in, and our confidence has grown massively. If you are new to boating or have just not ventured very far yet, then this is the ideal way to use your boat more. We would probably never have crossed the channel without this organisation. Thanks to everyone on the trip for making it such fun, particularly Kevin, Peter and Clive.

Will I be buying a set of golf clubs?
What do you think?

Andy & Alison Woodhouse
Bongo