

Spring Cruise 2009

Saturday 23rd May

The flotilla gracefully set sail on that golden Saturday. Unable to believe our luck we unfurled the sails, switched off the engine and were soon engulfed by the peace of the Blackwater. In the distance we heard Peter giving orders to First Mate Glenn and he stood proudly at the tiller of Codan surveying his fleet. With a swish Jean and Robin on Polo IV glided past, leaving us in the wake of their years of sailing experience. In the distance Dualin, Solent Vagabond, Rose Tyler and Icenii II stormed ahead.

Rob reflected on why Grey Goose was lagging behind the others. He noticed she had been lying low in the water before we left. Was it the fact that the entire contents of our local supermarket was packed into storage or was it the fact that the girls' vast teddy bear collection had stowed away on board? As he pondered we were joined by Phaedra from Bradwell who had been given permission to tag along.

Soon the fleet was anchored up in Pyefleet Creek and invitations to cocktails on Rose Tyler and Icenii II were delivered in person by Glenn, Peter's dingy bound messenger.

Sue, Dave, Betty and Keith were very generous hosts to us all and to Gordon, our neighbours' kidnapped gnome whom we (Rob) had decided to take for a sail.



(Peter and Gordon bonding)

The hospitality received was so good that I vaguely remember getting back to Grey Goose before collapsing in a haze of Merlot.

Sunday 24th May

Pyefleet Creek on a magically still morning at sunrise. A moment to savour.



(Polo IV at 4:30am)

The eerie silence shattered only by the odd curlew, the sound of anchors being hauled and the gentle sound of captains calmly giving instructions to their crew in an ordered manner (!) Leaving Rose Tyler and

Phaedra behind the remaining boats slipped out of the creek. We watched the sunrise over Brightlingsea as we headed out into the Blackwater. Sails were hoisted immediately as the wind gently nudged us along. The sailing was fabulous. Even Grey Goose was zipping along, although the girls seemed more interested in their computers and keeping in touch with land lubber friends by e mail.

It was a long but enjoyable journey and we could not believe the wonderful weather. Andy on Dualin gracefully erected his shute – a glorious flash of colour setting its mark in the water.



(Dualin cutting a dash)

Obviously the sailing was making Andy hungry as he was soon on the radio trying to find the source of the wonderful aroma of cooking bacon. It turned out to be Rose on Solent Vagabond making breakfast for Colin. Short of doing a

Captain Jack Sparrow and boarding their boat, Andy decided just to dream of breakfast.



(Solent Vagabond sailing
with bacon sandwiches
Yumm...)

The Medway welcomed us and we motored to Gillingham and negotiated the lock in groups. The berths in the marina were as tricky as ever and with some rather interesting manoeuvres from Codan's captain and crew we were soon in place. There followed a frenzy of cleaning and organising before we staggered up to the bar for a late lunch. As we were going up for lunch the Harbourmaster approached us looking flustered. He wanted to know where the owner of Codan was as he had put her in a berth required that night by the regular incumbent! Peter had already taken his place in the bar and we provided a

description of our leader. At that moment Liz and Alex produced Gordon the Gnome from my handbag and said "He looks like this". Easily identified, Peter was on hand to move Codan with the help of a good team. A fantastic roast dinner was followed in our case by an early night.



(Gordon at Gillingham)

Monday 25th May

Robin correctly summarised the position in which we found ourselves on a wet, blowy Bank Holiday Monday morning when he said "You have a couple of lovely days and then you pay for it all week". How prophetic those words were. We were all anxious to be in the best position possible for our trip to London the next day. After a democratic vote over a few coffees it was agreed that we would move our flotilla to Queenborough and anchor up there for the night. In that way we

would cut our journey time down and be right at the mouth of the Medway ready for the off.

Grey Goose was heading to Southend Pier for the afternoon anyway to see the Air show. The Red Arrows buzzed us as we sailed across the river and the views were spectacular. We anchored up for a picnic on deck, much enjoyed by Gordon the Gnome who had never been to the Air Show, unless you can count the bees and butterflies that swoop past him every day

The spectacle had about an hour to go when Rob noticed the blackest clouds imaginable heading towards us. We quickly left and for Queenborough, heading into the perfect storm on the way. The forks of lightning certainly got the girls attention as they were momentarily drawn from their Nintendo games. We battled into the Swale where we found all the bouys had been taken. Polo IV kindly agreed to have us join them on their bouy and to watch Robin use his "duck" to hook us up was like watching a magician. With sleight of hand he had us secure in no time. The rain lashed us for most of the evening before stopping for an hour or so at sunset.

We decided on a quiet night on the boat with Rob and Alex playing battleships until the early hours

Tuesday 26th May

The day had come – at last Grey Goose’s first trip up the Thames. The crashing together of Polo IV and Grey Goose woke us up as did the sound of wind lashing through the sheets. It did not bode well. Keeping in touch (at this stage by mobile phone as our radio had broken) the team felt that we would wait a little to see if the weather died down. Weekend however snuck away early, leaving us waverers in their wake. Eventually Peter decided it was time to go. Polo IV decided that the sea was too rough for her little engine and Jean had already made shopping plans in Chatham where they were headed instead. Robin wished us well as we bravely set off.



(Captain Rob...sponsored by Gill)

The sea was heavy and the oilskins were on. If the sea is a cruel mistress, this time

she did the equivalent of slapping our faces and pouring cold water over our heads.



(Iceni II's smallest crew member)

After an hour of getting nowhere I saw Iceni II turn. I felt my heart break. We were going to give up and all our dreams of sailing the Thames were shattered. We texted Robin and Jean to put the kettle on as we were on our way back. An hour or two later we convened at Chatham after a very breezy trip back along the Medway. Little did we know that the lock was controlled by a man who would feel much more comfortable teaching applied quantum physics at Cambridge! He caused near chaos as we crowded into the capacious lock but being T.C.C. we made light of it all. Soon we were moored up on the “events pontoon” and happy to be so after a difficult day full of disappointment. That sadness was soon lost when

we made plans to visit London over the next few days and to keep our date with Betty at the Houses of Parliament. The only boat which made it to Limehouse was Weekend who had defied convention and bravely fought the elements. We were in awe and we all raised a glass to toast their success, with a small amount of jealousy.



(T.C.C. at Chatham - Safe at last!)

Wednesday 27th and Thursday 28th May

For the junior crew of Grey Goose it was a whirlwind of the London Eye, Tower of London, National Gallery, Horseguards Parade, Convent Garden, food fun and frolics. This was interspersed with Rob trying to buy a new radio for Grey Goose. The highlight was the visit Betty organised to the Houses of Parliament where we met most of the other members of the fleet. With no jokes whatsoever regarding MP’s expenses we all enjoyed our

visit and are indebted to Betty for her organisational skills. What a place to work! Colin and Rose on Solent Vagabond decided to leave London to the rest of us and departed for a romantic trip on the Swale. Icenii II had decided to make a head start by getting to Queenborough ready for the off the next day. By the end of Thursday we were just four boats enjoying the wonderful weather and the delights of Chatham harbour and the European Cup Final



(Young guns out on the Town)

Friday 29th May

After a final shower in the luxury bathrooms at Chatham it was an early departure from the lock. Our eldest Liz as usual slept until late morning. Luckily the lock keeper was completely in control and saw us out. Dualin was off to Belgium so just three of us left that morning. Again the magic of an early morning start was not lost on us. The water was so still and the rising sun painted the Medway in

gold. Even the container port looked beautiful.

We were just reaching Garrison Point when we were engulfed by the thickest fog I had seen since the last Harry Potter film. We lost sight of each other and the air was suddenly filled with the terrifying sound of fog horns. We were heading into the shipping channel and it felt like stepping into the traffic at Piccadilly Circus wearing a blindfold. Peter's foresight and experience came into play as he radioed the Coast Guard to see what was about. Robin suggested we three survivors huddle together to "make a bigger blob on the radar"...a sensible but scary suggestion. The fog soon began to lift and we looked across to the Montgomery to see Codan heading straight for it. We could only assume that Glenn and Peter wanted to do some close hand research on sunken WW2 vessels!! Peter soon guided her back on track and we were bathed in sunshine once more.

The sail back was just as glorious as our sail there. We were speeding through the Wallet Spitway before we knew it and Polo IV did some excellent manoeuvres to show us how it is done.

Poetry in Motion! We bid Codan and Polo IV a fond farewell as we were heading to Bradwell for a couple of nights. The others were off to Brightlingsea where we hear they enjoyed Fish and Chips and the satisfaction of having organised and been part of a great cruise.



(Codan in full sail)



(Pure Elegance... Polo IV)

We reflected on our journey. We may not have sailed to London but we had made new friends and learned so much from the experienced members of our club. More importantly we could claim to be the first members of TCC to take a Gnome sailing! Gordon is now back under his bush but boy, does he have a few yarns to tell.