

Brilliant bash for British Boats in the blue and brown Baltic and Holland [pity we hadn't gone to Belgium for my alliteration].

John Apps – 'Shear Stress'

What a great club the Roach Sailing Association is. We have nice friendly racing; a great social atmosphere both on and off the boats; people who really care about other club members and couldn't be more helpful. And to make it really easy remembering names nearly everyone is called John or Jon. As foreigners in England both Heather and I are so pleased that we found the RSA.

But then to be able to visit four different countries in a period of six weeks is to me the raisin in the scone. Where we live in Australia [Brisbane] our nearest country is approximately 2000 miles away, so it is unimaginable for us to sail there for a short holiday. If you planned that you may as well keep going and circumnavigate.

At first I had decided that I would just do the two weeks to Holland, but Jon Walmsley's extension to the Baltic did have a certain appeal, as I had never met anyone who had sailed there. So the Thursday before we all left on the Saturday I decided that yes I would do the lot. In retrospect it was too long, maybe I should have started off with the two weeks this year learn all my lessons and move onto longer next year. It was devastating to me to find my presence was not critical to our business and that everything hummed along very nicely in my absence.



What were the highlights in my opinion? The Dutch Canals were great, in that we could sail when the wind was with us, although having to drop the sails quickly as you came around a corner and were confronted with a closed bridge with one foot of clearance was a test of your skills single handed. I notice Pudmuddle had a filled water bottle on his jib halyard, to aid a quick drop, I

didn't connect mine to my forestay and just let it drop into the water most of the time.



Mooring at Leeuwarden in the Dutch Canals. Pudmuddle is moored alongside Imothes and can just be seen sticking out in front of the boat in the foreground.

Then there was Copenhagen. We moored on one of the canals right near the centre of the city, and I think I have never had such a great mooring. I am very disappointed with the photos I took as they just can't convey the ambience of the place. The only part of Copenhagen I was unhappy with was the Tivoli Gardens which did not live up to my expectations. But now I can say I have been to them.



Best anchorage was one where I stopped on a day that the winds were so light I could not keep up with Imothes. Thuro Bund was an inlet in the middle of an island, surrounded by wooded hills. Very few people in the Baltic anchor out, many don't appear to even have anchors. There were only about five boats in this quite large anchorage at least the size of Pyefleet and although I arrived at dusk and left at dawn it was one of the prettiest places I have ever stayed.

The least enjoyable aspect of the holiday was the second day crossing the North Sea. I enjoyed the first day and the night both ways. But that second day without sleep is a real chore. It was great that Pudmuddle and Shear Stress stayed together most of the way across and particularly through the night, it not only helped me stay awake but gave me a lot of confidence. I ran out of wind just on the Western edge of the Deep Water Route on the way back at night. I was most impressed how, as I wallowed for about two hours before starting my engine, the ships all passed me quite happily with no sounding of horns or putting of lights on me.

The most frightening experience was going up the Elbe at night, with the tide running with you at five knots and a fifteen knot headwind. I had the engine going as I didn't like to tack amongst all the ships running up with me even though I was just out of the main channel. About one in three of the ships would put these very high powered search lights on you. I still don't know why as I was well out of their way. Maybe in the spray and waves my radar signature was poor but just enough to mystify them. I arrived in Brunsbüttele at 0700 with only fumes in my petrol tanks. I used the last of my petrol patrolling up and down looking for Imothes and finally went into a Yacht Haven on the Elbe side of the Kiel Canal. After a couple of hours sleep I got up to find Jon, Jenny and Naomi walking down the opposite side of the Yacht Haven to where I was moored, so we were all back together again after one and a half days and two nights coming up from Borkum. The other thing I discovered was that I had completely killed my battery after two nights on nav lights and unfortunately I had fitted a solar panel and wired it the wrong way round.



Imothes doing their washing as we went up the Kiel Canal.

Only ever saw one other British boat with the exception of the British Kiel Yacht Club. Peter and Anne were on a Moody 30 something footer on the island of Femo waiting out a bit of rough weather, I had to keep going I was still trying to catch Imothes. They were from Colchester and belonged to the Maldon Little Ships Club. The one thing they told me that might be very useful for the club is that the Fish Restaurant at West Mersea will deliver to the Oyster Sheds at Pyefleet if you have sufficient numbers. So that might have been worth going to the Baltic to find out.



Fogged in at the British Kiel Yacht Club. This is basically a British Military establishment for adventure training in sailing. Met some Americans/Canadians here on a 57' foot Arens with an air conditioned cockpit and really cold beer.

My best sail was between the island of Terschelling and Ijmuiden. Started at 0500 with a relatively light following wind that gradually built to about 20 knots. I had a full main and a genoa poled out. I should have shortened sail but I rationalised that if something was going to break now better in sight of land than crossing the North Sea which we were to do the next day. I averaged 7 knots and hit 10.6 knots according to my log. That's not bad for a 22 footer. I did snap a shackle on my boom vang or kicking strap but easily replaced that.

The major lessons I learnt were that: yes an autohelm would be useful when you are single-handed doing legs that last 30 hours. The autohelm may have been useful on some other occasions as well. Don't take a petrol engine to the Baltic. It is impossible

to get petrol without a long walk carrying containers. Diesel is offered at every yacht haven no matter how small. Don't buy tinned meat in Denmark, there is only one type, it is expensive and it looks tastes and smells like dogfood. The tinned fish in Denmark is not much better. Tinned meat and fish in Germany is without par for variety flavour and quantity of vegetables. You also need a reliable means of charging your battery if you don't want to spend every second night in a yacht haven on a charger. I must admit I never had trouble charging my battery in a yacht haven from shore based power. Don't expect your mooring to be waiting for you when you return to Paglesham even when you have paid in advance for the time you will be away.

Some of the great members of the RSA who made my trip so enjoyable deserve thanks. Firstly Jon Walmsley in Imothes planned our whole trip, provided much needed tools and advice and lent me money when my debit card expired. [I don't know what I thought the date was as I had checked it before I left]. John Langrick lent me extra flares although I never got to use them so had to give them back, which was a big disappointment. He also lent me a North Sea pilot, which I must admit I only ever looked at once and that was to find the Yacht Haven at Ijmuiden. He also lent me a handheld VHF, to supplement my main one as the aerial connection was misbehaving although I later fixed that with Jon Walmsley's tools. Richard and Justine in Pudmuddle must be the easiest boat in the world to follow. Not only is their hull very easy to see, but at a distance there yellow sails always stand out from all other boats. Of course when she decided to cut a corner with her keel up, she is not so great to follow. Naomi Bessey also joined me for the first crossing of the North Sea, but found the only way she could stop herself from being seasick was to crawl up into a quarter berth headfirst and sleep. I felt so sorry for her but found the fact there was nothing I could do to help her was very frustrating.

One thing that does trouble me about the whole trip is that I had known we were going on a motoring holiday, I might have been better with a Morris Minor instead of a sailing boat.

Lastly a little competition. If you are the first* person to correctly identify the three green objects on the right of the picture below I will give you a bottle of my finest Australian Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay. Your choice. If no-one can identify the objects I will have to drink it myself or bring it down for a club night. [First is defined as the first communication I receive telling me what the objects are. My email is shearstress@raskl.freerve.co.uk

