

A SCILLY IDEA

Why not sail from Lands End to the Isles of Scilly and then back again in a Wayfarer Dinghy? This somewhat seemingly crazy idea came about following a successful non-stop circumnavigation of the Isle of Wight in 2014. This is an annual event that is very well organised by Jenny Jeffs, John Norman and a team of supporting volunteers from the Wayfarer Association.

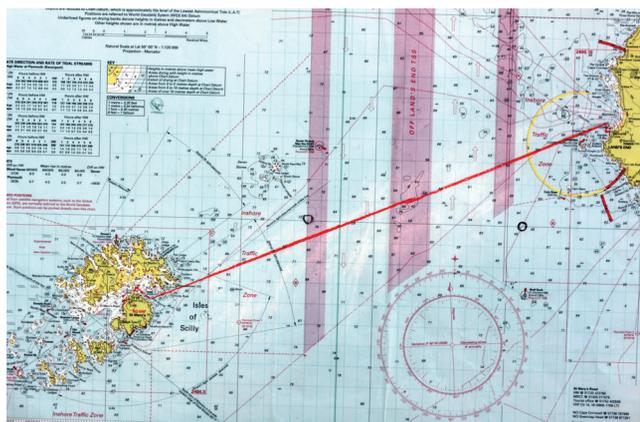
What a brilliant idea I thought! And so almost a year later a date was placed on the calendar that met the requirements of tide and predicted weather conditions and which also suited all the expected participants. However the weather did its own thing, bringing the intended proceedings to a halt just 24 hours before the scheduled departure time. We soon realised that the only way forward was to throw the calendar out of the window and to set a date for the outbound and inbound sail that only took account of friendly weather conditions and that would therefore hopefully give us safe passage.

This approach clearly identified a departure date of the 25th of June. This gave the crews around some 20 hours' notice to be on the beach at Sennen ready to set sail. This did mean however that we would have to rely upon a fairly accurate weather forecast for the return journey some 6 or 7 days later. The passage plan was to set sail from Sennen Beach (Lands End) on a heading that would take us to St Marys IOS (49.55N 6.19W) in two MK1V Hartley Wayfarers. One Wayfarer owned and crewed by John Lethbridge from Port Isaac, with myself, Colin Shepherd from Chew Valley Lake SC); the second Wayfarer crewed by Mike Higgins and John Kelly - also from CVLSC.

It had been the original intention that both boats would depart from Sennen Beach on the same day, but independent commitments from both sets of crews lead to the Lethbridge/Shepherd boat leaving on the 25th and the Higgins/Kelly boat leaving on the 26th, thus resulting in two different sailing experiences in the outbound sail. Sennen is definitely an acquired taste when it comes to launching. The slip is so steep that 4X4's burn out their clutches in any attempt to gain the higher ground. Our challenge would not have been possible without the help of Harbour Master; Terry George launching us off from the beach.



Arriving by tractor



At 09.30 hrs we set off from the beach in a force 4 southerly wind on a close reach and following a bearing of 255 degrees that took us out past the Longships Lighthouse. Once past this point we went to a bearing of 235 degrees to take into account tide drift. We made a call to Falmouth Coastguard giving them our passage plan, number of crew and our ETA at St Mary's. They requested our vessel type and size as well as asking if we had anybody on shore that we were in contact with. The reply given was "Terry George, Sennen RNLI"; Falmouth seemed satisfied.

Once out of view of land we kept alert as we approached the Shipping Lanes; the rule "Sail over Power" is something Sea Captains just smile about from their double glazed sheds. Therefore judging a ship's speed against our own involved us holding back and slipping behind them.



Give way to boats with sheds on them

It was good fortune for us as there was no fog and the wind picked up from 4 to 5 which gave us a 5 to 8 knot speed in the right direction. We felt that our crossing time was going to be good as we judged ourselves to be at the halfway mark in less than 3 hours. John had put in a waymark for Tresco on a small hand held GPS that he had purchased some years before but had never used. We picked up our first sighting of the Scillies some 10 miles out, which was when we encountered our first bumpy sea due to tidal currents in this area.

At this distance it is easy to question one's position as, when you line up for the approach into St Marys, St Agnes blends into the headland. However with a compass bearing reset to 260 degrees, this put St Marys on our port and the Eastern Isles on our starboard. Just five and a half hours after leaving Sennen, and in glorious sunshine, we sailed onto the beach at St Marys, disappointed only by the fact that we had to make our first tack of the journey to do so, but we could live with that small issue.

Our thoughts now turned to Mike Higgins and John Kelly who were preparing their boat for the following day - Friday. A concern for us was that fog warnings were coming to us from the Harbour Masters office. Already flights from Lands End and Newquay Airport were being cancelled. This presents a problem to those on the IOS: as overnight accommodation would be at a premium due to it being fully booked by those travellers who can't get back to the mainland. Fortunately John Lethbridge is a member of the Port Isaac Sea Shanty Group - Fishermen's Friends and he has sung many times with Bone Idol, the IOS Shanty Group. Not only did we meet up with this fine group of men each evening, but one of our members, Desi Shave and his wife Sarah took pity on our vagrancy and so put us up in their home for the week. Much as we both love the Wayfarer there was no way we were going native on the floor of a MK1V, which is something for younger bones to explore. And so back to the sailing; an early call to Mike and John on Friday confirmed their position to be getting stuck into a lardy breakfast. This being due to the fact that they could not even see the breakwater at Sennen Cove, so please pass the Ketchup. A later call back to the boys at Sennen confirmed that their departure was now due for 12:30. That was the good news...the bad news was that the wind had shifted to a westerly - on the nose. This would have been fine if one had a full day to make the crossing and had wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to brush up on their tacking. This put their arrival way behind schedule and our concerns were very evident, not just for their welfare on the open sea, but for the fact that the bar kitchen was about to close and therefore it was looking increasingly like they might not make last orders for solids or fluids. The call finally came in - no, not Last Orders - their boat was sighted approaching the harbour. We shot down; it was a quick cuddle and then a race to the bar where we'd managed to get some solids put by that were then washed down with something non-salty.



The following morning was partly taken up with sorting out our kit on board. Both boats had a rear storage box together with a couple of dry bags, one for all the emergency gear: fog horns, flares, food, high energy drinks, radio, bits of string and shackles etc.



The bottle opener is here somewhere

Then off we went to sail around an Island each day. Tresco first, the north of the island gave us some exciting sea around Gimble Porth and Kettle Bottom where breaking seas did their best to challenge the Wayfarers. But the boats did us proud, even though we did not have time to put in a reef to make the sail more comfortable. This is what the trip was about though, not about us, but more about what a Wayfarer can cope with and keep its crew safe and reassured re its marvellous capabilities.



Apart from its many safety features the Wayfarers shallow draft made sailing in rocky waters possible. To this end I was joined by retired boatman Paul Hicks for the day who let it be known that he had never sailed before, but he did become an immediate convert. With his knowledge of the coastline we were able to thread our way in and around submerged rocks that had wrecked many ships over the centuries, thus allowing us to gain access to some fantastic beaches.



Taking a short break on Bryher



John Kelly trying out his inflatable dolls



The Wayfarers taking a break at St. Agnes

We sailed to St Agnes on one particular day via a passage around Bryher, picking our way through many rocky outcrops with the help and guidance of Desi Shave. Having him along did mean that, later that day, it was all then down to singing shanties outside the Turks Head on St Agnes. Word soon spread around the Island of our presence and that led to passing walkers also giving impromptu songs. All of this washed down with plenty of crushed apples.



A peaceful St. Agnes Mooring

By the end of the week, having sailed around all of the islands as well as visiting cruise ships, we started to think of our return journey as we were fully aware that we were only half way in our venture. Word was reaching us that the weather was on the change and a quick call to Sennen RNLI confirmed that it was currently a force 6 with a big ground swell; advice was that it would be better to leave it a day and see if it goes through, which it did. We therefore planned to leave St Marys on the following day and, after checking in with Falmouth, both Wayfarers left the beach at 10:00hrs.

The first leg turned out to be a motor sail for both boats, but once past the Eastern Isles we were both able to launch our kites which improved our speed no end. However after a few hours we had to give this up gracefully as the wind headed. We started picking up some rough troughs, and looking back at Mike and John's boat we did see it disappear from time to time.



The tip of Mike's mast just visible above the swell

Again shipping lanes were soon upon us with traffic split into the North and South lanes; so more giving way to power. Our next bearing was the Longships Lighthouse, making sure we kept it on our starboard side when trying to pick up Sennen Cove. This is where one needs to line up from the port side to avoid a rocky outcrop that cannot be seen at different states of the tide. Mike and John had the good

nature of letting us be the first “cannon fodder “ to hit the beach; a beach with a ground sea that one would love to see from the shore looking out but not in a 16ft dinghy trying to make the beach.



Out of the mist we can now see Land's End

The crashing waves not only flooded the boat but picked us up and dropped the boat on the beach, with waves still crashing over the stern. Well that would be all very well if we had a trolley under the boat, but a second wave suddenly picked up the boat and took her back out again. Yes we did make it and we can tell the tale, but now it was Mike and John's turn to hit the beach. Having watched the preceding comedy act they chose a slightly smoother part of the beach to come ashore – the benefit of holding back – so with two extra hands now on the shore and with the fantastic assistance of Terry George (Harbour Master) and his tractor it was all made a lot easier and it was not long before both boats were at the top of the slip. The tractor made all of the

difference and without it being there it could have been two Wayfarer wrecks for the local divers to explore.

To sum up, we sailed to and around the Isles of Scilly had met some fantastic people, had good company, good sailing, lots of memories of peoples communities and so much goodwill; all achieved in the very short time we spent visiting and sailing. As a footnote to this achievement it has to be said that this might have been a first for club members to sail a couple of Wayfarers to the Isles of Scilly, but it's not a first in what club Wayfarers and their crews have achieved over the near



A fond farewell

50 years that the club has been running. Names, too many to mention here, some of whom have long passed away, put the Wayfarer and CVLSC on the map for adventures on many of our coastal waters, and in non-stop circumnavigation of the Isle Of Wight. Praise indeed for the boats and their crews.

Colin Shepherd