

Hi Ship Mates!

Just arrived in Holyhead, after a truly memorable, amazing and exceptionally challenging weeks sailing. So where do we start? Well, we set sail from Neylands Marina having been Royally treated by both the marina and in particular the Neyland Yacht club, where Gwynn, two Johns and Fred (the YC committee) insured that we maximised our modest fundraising activities. Not only did Dick the Commodore produce a very generous £50 cheque from the club, but a super raffle including a days Golf, and a meal for two at the YC, made £195. Thanks so much you guys for all you did.

Meanwhile, Geoff and Sarah Browning had taken us under their wing. Not only did they collect our new crew member Daisy Wylam from the station, but Sarah processed a massive bundle of filthy clothes through her washing machine. We left Neylands, at the top of the Milford Sounds with Daisy on the helm and Oscar navigating. It was necessary to time our passage through Jacks Sound accurately, and we successfully navigated that tricky passage, having been given some excellent notes from a former Life Boat Man, Frank Penfold. Thank you Frank!

As we sped across St Bride's Bay we were suddenly joined by Dolphins, who delighted us for a while with their antics. As they lost interest we suddenly found ourselves surrounded by birds floating about. Oscar cut a mean course through them to discover they were Puffins. How amazing! Probably the missing Puffins from Lundy.

But as we approached Ramsey sound, I realised we were in trouble...

The tide had turned! And although we entered Ramsey Sound, we could not make any Headway. Also, there is a nasty chicane of rocks halfway up the sound, called 'The Bitches', and the thought of engine failure in massive currents, and somehow ending up too close to them, caused me to bail out on that attempt, and seek refuge along the top of St Bride's Bay at the charming village of Solva, situated up a mini Fiord.

Oscar and Daisy went ashore to buy fuel and bumped into an extremely nice Harbourmaster by the name of Anthony, who promptly offered them a lift to the garage and a brief glimpse fo St David's Cathedral, which is a truly amazing, vast structure surrounded by the tiny village. Mission accomplished within 30 minutes - thank you Anthony.

A quick look at the tidal atlas revealed the chance for another attempt at Ramsey Sound, but horror of horrors, the eddies seemed to still be against us. Whilst we were able to just stagger passed 'The Bitches', it was impossible to get out of the sound, despite our 5 horses working overtime. We needed somewhere to bail out to, and the only option was White Sands Bay, which we tucked ourselves up in the top end of, set out two anchors, and ran a formal anchor watch throughout the night to ensure all would be well.

Despite signing up for the graveyard shift (2359 - 0130) I was allowed to sleep through! When quizzed, Oscar and Daisy just said that they thought I needed a few extra hours of kip. A gesture of self preservation I think.

So third time lucky and we nosed our way out into a healthy North flowing tide which whizzed us up to Fishguard. We had a very pleasant few hours at the Lower Harbour in Fishguard. Having reprovisioned and posted blog 3, it was time to leave for Aberaeron, which was duly reached after some sparkling sailing up the coast.

Our initial attempt at fore and aft mooring in a fast receding tidal harbour was not that successful (poor holding for our Kedge) but Bill the Harbourmaster tucked us into a neat spot that he had created for visitors, leaving us time to case the joint. And what a delightful little place this turned out to be. Coloured Houses; and delicious coffee at the Harbourmaster Hotel, where, quite by chance, we bumped into Nick and Liz.

He had sold his waste disposal company and they now have two properties in Spain. They were keen to hear about our trip and provided good company over a beer. Whilst there, we even managed a swim in the village pool, where Oscar kicked my butt having been challenged to a gentle two length sprint 'any stroke will do'.

Back on board we knuckled down to prepare for the off, waved goodbye to Nick and Liz (do come and see us at Benbow when you are up our way) and went to sea in a slight rush to avoid being left high and dry in the harbour for another night! However the wind was now on the beam and after a really good sail, we reached Pwllheli in the darkness and rain - but I parked her on a very convenient pontoon and we all went ashore for an excellent and much needed douche, after a long day at sea. ....

Next morning, we discovered to our delight, our neighbours (Southerly owners) were Keith and Bob. They were on a very well restored Southerly 100. Keith is an engineer, and was amazingly helpful in repairing the top of our mast where a tang had worked loose, during recent heavy weather, resulting in the gaff falling towards the crew - thankfully no one was hurt. It seemed that the bolt did not have the correct nut. An hour later after Oscar's galliant mast head meanderings (without a bosun's chair!) we were on our way to tackle a few more strategic headlands- wow these are serious stuff, with rip tides and eddies to contend with. If you add a 40 knot line squall to the equation, we were literally stopped in our tracks not far from a nasty reef. However, with jib and engine we were able to just about claw ourselves away from it and continue towards Bardsey Sound. This was safely negotiated thanks to Daisy's delightful efforts on the helm. At one stage it was more like sailing across a cauldron of boiling water in a paper boat.

We finally made Porth Dinllaen and just managed to secure a pint or two before closing time. Terrific welcome from the proprietor Briony, and Stuart, her bar-tender son. They seemed amazed that we had turned up apparently out of nowhere in the middle of the night, in rubber dinghy adorned in full offshore gear. Moreover, Briony and Stuart took a great interest in our charitable fundraising, producing a significant donation (Thank you very much Briony), as we disappeared in to the night once more.

After a few hours kip, we sped out of the sound, happily dead downwind, with Genoa goose-winged to windward. A couple of hours later we sailed between the rising sun to Starboard and a magnificent rainbow to Port. It was almost as if we were being let through the gates after all our efforts to get to our destination. We celebrated by popping up the very lively Cayman Islands Gennaker, complete with Sir Turtle, who then lead us Northwards to Holy Island and Holyhead. But the weather had not

finished with us yet, and we were soon reefed down in Force 6-7. Indeed, we even had to sail up the harbour as the outboard was simply insufficient to push us forwards.

Great welcome at Holyhead, wher Geoff Garrard and his office team, Suzanne and Gweneth issued us with ensuite shower facilities (first time ever in my experience!) Also, thanks to Chal for getting the Marina staff up and running, and Nick for his emaculate web mastering. Also, Pippa, we've finished the ginger cake.

Very sadly it's goodbye to my dear shipmates Oscar Nowak and the delightful and enthusiastic Daisy Wylam, who passed her RYA compent crew certificate this very morning - well done Daisy!

Coming up to 400nm done, nearly a third of the way. Boat and skipper in good shape if a little knackered!

Fair winds,

Mike