

GCCC Summer Cruise 2016

This year's cruise had the ambitious target of getting to the Helford River in Cornwall. Our Rear Commodore & cruise leader, had put together an interesting mix of overnight stops and lay-days comprising large towns and quiet little creeks.

The main event began on the Sunday at Torquay. Those with few work constraints had a leisurely sail (or motor) via Yarmouth and/or Portland whilst others, with little or no wind on the Saturday and 25kns on the nose for Sunday found the going a little more demanding.

Misty Blue and Quickstep had a chance meeting on the water, south of Poole on Sunday morning, while revelling in strong winds. Quickstep arrived in Torquay later that day to be greeted by our cruise leader who advised us to 'drop everything' and directed us straight to the Royal Torquay YC as dinner was on the table and there was just time to catch the chef before the food ran out. This was very much appreciated after some 14 hours of beating to windward in the rain!

Emmalyn arrived the following day in time to catch the last Ferry taking us all to Brixham for a pre-arranged dinner at Brixham Yacht Club. The evening return journey gave the more senior members a chance to show off their bus passes! These two dinners proved to be the start of a series of excellent dinners at various sailing and yacht clubs over the duration of the whole two week cruise.

Tuesday dawned to a leaden sky and a westerly F5, again on the nose. The heavier boats like Shibumi, Cadh'Ruadh and Misty Blue seemed to revel in these conditions despite the odd shower. Quickstep took in three reefs and powered up wind, to the delight of a pod of porpoises! They played on the bow pressure wave and the quarter wake for some 20 minutes before disappearing below. Kamelya, Emmalyn and Last Laugh were close behind as we all made our way to Salcombe. On reaching the shelter of the harbour, a drowned valley, we tied up on the visitors' pontoon in 'The Bag'. This brought on mixed memories for the writer, at the grand age of 6 years old on a happy family holiday, rowed a dinghy onto an iron stake in a falling tide - resulting in a somewhat anxious and angry father!

Salcombe was the second of our lay-days and we all wandered around town to sample the local coffee, cakes and lunches, whilst dodging the rain. Later that evening we were joined by our previous Rear Commodore and his wife, who had recently moved house into the area, and we had a Safari supper. Moving from boat to boat for a three course dinner, we all had an excellent evening.

Well fed and rested, our little fleet set off for Queen Anne's Battery in Plymouth. A small bank of fog rolling down the valley to the harbour entrance encouraged Misty Blue to tack inshore, making the most of a big wind shift and first to arrive at their berth. Quickstep timed their tack inshore for best use of tide and were next to arrive followed soon after by the rest of the fleet. Once rested, the fleet were provided with the writer's afternoon tea and cakes, later followed by a great dinner at the Royal Western YC.

The following day some boat members rested on board while others strode out to explore the city. Our Commodore joined the fleet to meet up at the Plymouth Gin distillery for a 4.30pm tour and tasting. Each boat member then wandered off to find dinner somewhere and enjoy a quiet night before the long trip to Helford River next day.

The cruise leader had been busy again, this time constructing a 100 question quiz for the journey, a 'timed passage' sheet and a yet-to-be handicap system to finalise the results. During the 40M passage we again had wind on the nose although lighter at 8-15knts. By now both Misty Blue and Quickstep were playing their usual 'tag' as they each changed position until the wind increased and Misty Blue powered ahead.

The entrance to the Helford River is wide with steep sides and there were dinghies racing about while we all sought our visitor buoys for mooring. It was at this point that Shibumi developed an engine problem for which Cadh'Ruadh took her alongside in tow, allegedly attempting to claim salvage rights! It transpired that the starter motor had come loose and had sheared off the cone to its front bearing.

The Helford River Sailing Club sits in a beautiful setting on the southern bank and the views are just stunning, the sort of place you say "if only" and "I will come back". It was at this point that Delfino joined the fleet for few days. The club had kindly invited us to join their club BBQ, which appeared more like a 'royal feast'. Their new caterers, only three days into the job, managed an overwhelming table of food, BBQ meats, cold meats, homemade coleslaw, salads and an endless supply of chips. This was followed by an 'exchange of burgees' to celebrate GCCC's western cruising limit.



Exchanging burgees on a very happy evening at the Helford River Sailing Club

Sunday, the returning point of our cruise, broke with a dull sky and showers but a nice SW breeze. One of Emmalyn's crew for the outward journey, jumped home while the writer

jumped on board to provide Emmalyn with some racing tweaks which left the writer's crew to take Quickstep into Falmouth. Meanwhile Cadh'Ruadh took its 'salvage prize' in tow to Falmouth while the rest of us headed there in our own way!



Cadh'Ruadh, 'claiming salvage', shows the text book method for side-by-side towing (technically 'pushing'), with Cadh'Ruadh's stern behind the unpowered boat (Shibumi)

Falmouth is a large natural harbour with naval and commercial shipping and an impressive sailing area. Our leader again came up trumps, having arranged for the presence of a national shanty event, thousands of people huddled in tents and sporting umbrellas while listening to sea shanties in the rain. The rain continued all through the evening and night with our Commodore hob-knobbing with our neighbours - the 'boat next door':-



The Commodore's passion for the 'boat next door'

Now on our first return leg of the cruise, a lay-day and the weather improved, crew on Quickstep removed Shibumi's broken starter motor with its sheared-off nose cone while her skipper phoned around for a replacement to be quoted £550-£800+ and two days delivery by the local Volvo agent. Googling for a local welder, he managed to get the starter motor fixed within three hours at a relatively modest sum while the fleet enjoyed the attractions of the National Maritime Museum, adjacent to our berths in Port Pendennis Marina. He again came up triumphs later that evening with a wine-tasting and dinner at the Royal Cornwall YC. Dinner was fantastic, all done by a single chef and the bar lady. It also proved somewhat emotional for Cadh'Ruadh's skipper and wife who discovered a burgee and old photograph both framed on the dining-room wall and proving to be of her grandfather's J-Class America Cup boat 'Astra'. The skipper addressed us with a little background history while doing his best to suppress the emotion with which this momentous surprise had given both himself and his wife!

Tuesday, 17th June dawned and the rain-soaked marina was drying out under a light SW wind. Some of the fleet departed around 7am for our next leg to Fowey and make best use of the East going tide, while others felt sleep deserved a higher priority. The light wind made for slow progress, too slow for some who chose to switch on their 'iron genoa'. Quickstep, however, simply switched on their red masthead gennaker, but even they eventually resorted to the engine. Misty Blue played with poling out their jib but also to no avail and the sound of diesel engines permeated the area.



Could this be Misty Blue?

We all arrived on the Fowey mid-river pontoons in fine weather and enjoyed a wander about the pretty town after launching our tenders. Later that evening we all arrived at the Royal Fowey Yacht Club for a very nice dinner and splendid riverside views. The Commodore presented the cruise leader and his wife with a collective gift of two designer quality cushions for Shibumi, an expression of the fleet's gratitude for their arranging the summer cruise and for which they were both movingly quite touched.

The next day Misty Blue remained on their mooring as they prepared to depart later that day for an envious planned trip to South Brittany while we expressed our sadness at missing their company and set off for the River Yealm.

The Yealm has an interesting sand bar across the northern part of its entrance with a narrow channel running close to the southern shore, marked by red channel buoys before swinging north to the opposite side of the river. Leading marks provide safe passage to the deeper water upriver and the whole area is quite beautiful, unspoiled by commercial marinas or big developments and naff housing. The upstream visitors' pontoon is a fantastically quiet place to moor with shore access only by dinghy.



Having finished the last of Quickstep's fruitcake, the fleet settles down

Some of the fleet went ashore to the Yealm Yacht Club for an excellent and very good value BBQ while others used their supplies on board. The setting sun and descending mist provided a magical silence engulfing the pontoon, a silence broken only by the eerie cry of a heron - and a certain person's laughter on her return after walking Cadh'Ruadh's dog!

The fear of having to find our way out of the river the following day in fog melted away in the morning sunshine, just as the overnight fog had done. With a bright and early start for Dartmouth the fleet moved out of the river to set sail in a light breeze. Rounding Start Point was a doddle compared with our journey down from Torquay and entering the River Dart was also easy with well-marked buoys and a wide deep entrance. Mooring at Darthaven however was a bit of an issue for Quickstep and Emmalyn arriving a little later to find the

tide ripping through the visitor's pontoon making it tricky for them to perform a most elegant rafting manoeuvre.

Dinner at the Royal Dart YC had been arranged while we enjoyed their waterside deck views and family crew arrived to join Last Laugh for it's long return leg home the following day. During dinner a straw vote on the in/out Brexit issue took place with GCCC voting 'in' by two votes and the locals voting 'out' by one. The morning would say who was right. It was also a prize-giving dinner for the previous Saturday's quiz and timed passage. All answers had been adjudicated on Shibumi to ensure consistency of marking and the winning boat was declared as Kamelya skippered by the President and his wife with help from their ever-knowing crew member, our very own Commodore! Results of the timed passage were held in abeyance pending the application of a suitable handicap system, although Quickstep appeared to concede to Misty Blue who used their engine for only 4 minutes. Well done to both boats!

Awaking on Friday morning to the eventful news that Britain was leaving the EU, Last Laugh and Quickstep with more pressing needs took their own leave and departed for home. Last Laugh, joined by their son and planning to stop off in Poole, made such good time that they decided to press on to Yarmouth, arriving around 9pm to crash out and sleep. Quickstep sailed the whole 100miles back to Gosport in one hit, arriving around 11.30pm after 17 hours! The remaining fleet spent a very interesting morning on a tour of the Britannia Royal Naval College. Unfortunately no cream tea at the college was available as it transpired that more than the requested notice of 48hrs was required.

Saturday saw the fleet return en masse to their home ports, finally parting company around St Alban's Head. Emmalyn moored alongside Shibumi while at anchor in Studland Bay and shared a curry and glass of wine each before Emmalyn moved off to anchor nearby and settle down for a peaceful night.

Sunday was a lovely bright day with favourable wind in which to finish off our wonderful two-week cruise.

Postmark - As with any cruise it requires a lot of hard work to make the event pleasurable and fun for all. Our thanks go out to our cruise leader and his wife for making this trip a very happy and memorable occasion.

Quickstep Skipper

Post-postmark - Thank you all for being such great company and to Quickstep's Skipper for putting this report together. As they say, "nothing broke (except our starter motor!), nothing fell off and no one got lost".

Cruise Leader and wife (Shibumi).