

Roach Sailing Association

www.roachriver.org.uk/rsa/

September 2018 Newsletter

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Chairman's Report

Jon Walmsley

I am composing this during a late September cruise up the Blackwater. I went into Maylandsea to look at OUR BOY, (Robin and Toby Slater's Brixham trawler), before taking the tide up to Maldon where Seven barges were flying pennants from their topmasts.



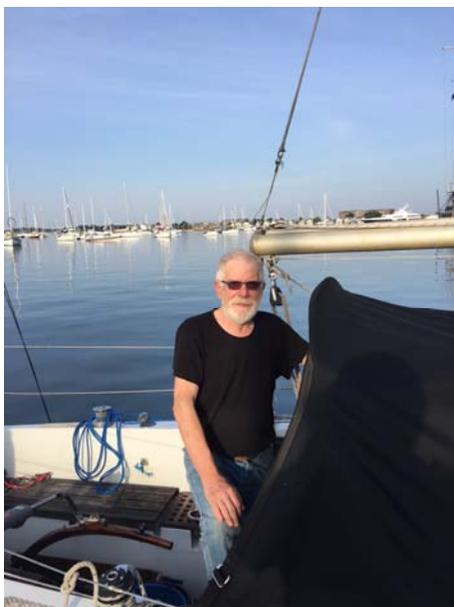
Maldon from the waterside

I spent a quiet night off Bradwell in company with the Thames Sailing Barge ARDWINA. In the morning I could hear the clink, clink clink of ARDWINA's anchor being raised and as I sailed past the topsail was being set. ARDWINA headed North while PAKLJHAWA went South across the Denghie Flats with the early flood.



Sailing Barge ARDWINA

This Two night cruise, although pleasant and blessed with good weather, was a drop in the Roach when compared with the voyages of other RSA members in 2018. As usual RSA boats have been far and wide. In June I sailed to Albania with Shaun in BRIAR ROSE. AMBITION II returned from the Caribbean after more than a year away; <https://ambition2.org/>, and John Apps completed yet another transatlantic jester race in RAVEN; <https://jesterchallenge.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/john-apps-and-raven-diaryv2.pdf> and <https://jesterchallenge.wordpress.com/2018/05/08/the-challenge-2018-to-rhode-island-has-begun/>. John the Bridge's son Cy and partner Sarah completed their circumnavigation of Europe in DORIS; <https://deardoris.blog/>, and LADY ROSEMARY was sailed single handed to the Mediterranean and back by Mark.



John Apps and RAVEN

Back on the Essex Rivers we have had a successful season with good attendance at all club events. In particular Seventeen boats and well over thirty crew attended the Fambridge Rally. The racing, both dinghy and cruising, is thriving despite being slightly chaotic at times, (the Secretary and I have had words with the Race Officer about this).

I look forward to seeing you all at the Steak and Oysters on Sunday 14th October and at the Laying Up Supper.

A warm welcome to the following new members:

Wes Absolom	MOLLY MALONE
David Caten	Trapper 28
Phil Joyce	ENDYMION
Boglarka Nemeth	RED RUM
Paul Stranks	SYLVAN
Balint Vida	RED RUM
Keith Walker	MARTHA 1V

Laying up Supper

The laying up supper will be at the Ballard's Gore Golf Club on Saturday 17th November 2017 from 19:00 onwards

Starter

Ardennes Pâté with Red Onion Chutney
Prawn Cocktail

Main

Slow Roast Brisket of Beef with Red Wine Jus
Breast of Chicken served With Brandy and Mushroom Sauce

Dessert

Apple Pie and Ice Cream
Chocolate Profiteroles

A selection of Cheese is available instead of the desserts at an additional cost of £2.50

Tea/Coffee and mint included

If you have special dietary requirements, please contact Clem who has again kindly agreed to take the reservations for this and please send your menu options with your booking. We do need payment in advance with your booking. The price is £30 per head (£32.50 if your having the

cheese). There are two methods of paying. The first and easiest is direct transfer to the RSA account of the Roach Sailing Association. If you chose this way to pay, please also send a mail to Simon, cc Clem

The alternative is by cheque payable to the **Roach Sailing Association** at the address below. Please note either way we will need to know your menu options.

Clem Freeman
Hunters Lodge, Larkhill Rd
Canewdon
ESSEX SS4 3RZ

Roach Sailing Association
Sort Code 20-79-73
Acc 80751138
clem.freeman@btinternet.com
simon.joel@hotmail.co.uk

Racing Update

Jon Walmsley

Thirty four boats contested Eight cruiser races and Six dinghy races this year. As last year, both of the series winners entered every single point scoring race.

The dinghy racing was well attended. There was an especially good turnout for the Mudcatcher's Cup which was one of the highlights of the year for me. BLUEBOTTLE, NANI DRAGON and MAKEDO contested every point scoring race with BLUEBOTTLE getting three wins and the Dinghy Bowl.



BLUEBOTTLE, ELG and APPLE

BLUEBOTTLE	18
NANI DRAGON	16
ELG	9
MAKEDO	8
APPLE	7
SARAH EDITH	6
PATCH	5
MERGANSER	4
PUGWASH II	2.5
CELESTINE II	2
TAZ	1.5
IANJO	1
LITTLE LINDA	0.5
STELLA MARIE	0.5
TRINGA	0.5

Despite LUCY's handicap being reduced throughout the year, her performance more than made up for it. Her three wins were nearly

matched by MARTINIQUE with two wins and third place in the series. SCHERZO was another strong contender, but did not compete in enough races to threaten LUCY at the top of the leaderboard.



LUCY, VERLOCITY, AKVAVIT and GINGER LEI

LUCY	17
SCHERZO	9.5
MARTINIQUE	9
ULABELLA	9
PAKLJHAWA	6
WATERWYTCH	5.5
IMOTHES	4.5
AKVAVIT	4
EOLE	4
INDI	4
LOTUS	4
GRAND TOUR	3
JOUET	2
VERLOCITY	2
LOTUS BAVARIA	2
GOSHAWK	1.5
GINGER LEI	1.5
RIFF RAFF	1.5

Please would last year's RSA cup winners return the trophies to me or another committee member ASAP so that they can be engraved for presentation at the Laying Up Supper.

Bosun (and Editor's) Corner

John Langrick

Many thanks for all the articles received in this newsletter. We have entries from far afield as well as local. Again, many thanks and well done to all.

Please note that this and all other newsletters will be on our WEB site and call always be referenced there

Sutton Wharf

The dates I have currently booked for haul out are as follows:

Oct 22 - 26

Nov 6 - 9.

Nov 21 - 23

Nov 26 - 27

Of course other dates are available and in that case, please arrange yourself with the yard. If you do wish to use these dates then please let me know as we can coordinate with others and this helps with travel logistics as well as helping the yard. This also gives us the opportunity to bring your cradle out of the compound. Can you

also let me know if you want your mast lowering this winter, so we can schedule machines and helpers.

The storage rates for 2018 will be £0.50p per week.

Haul out and launch costs are as follows:

Travel hoist, up to 4' draft:

10' - 19' £60

20' - 24' £70

25' - 29' £85

30' - 32' £90

32' - 35' £125

16 Tonne Hoist £125 each way

35 Tonne Hoist £150 each way

All the above are subject to VAT.

Paglesham

We have had another virtually trouble free year at Paglesham allowing us all to concentrate on sailing.

Our only issue was that one of the residents took umbrage that someone (probably not a member of the RSA), left some litter and rubbish at the top of the slip. We have confirmed to management that this was not left by any RSA member, but probably just a member of the public picnicking on the sea wall. In any case it is worth reminding members that there is no facility in the yard for disposing of rubbish, so please take it home and dispose of it.

It is also not advised to leave a dinghy tied up on the jetty as wind and tide can create havoc and we have had them break lose.

Dally

Many of you will know we have replaced DALLY with an Oyster 6 open boat. The old DALLY was getting a bit 'tired' and although she gave us many years service, she is now sold..



DALLY finishing fitting out

She has given us good service this year and often manned by Steward and his granddaughter Lilly.

Lilly also helmed for me in IMOTHES for the Gracilda cup, in which she came second. This is an excellent achievement for which she received a gold medal at our barbecue later in the year on the PVT saltings, presented by our Chairman Jon Walmsley.



Lilly receives her 'award'



CORINNE at Woolverstone

And finally..

Barry Lewis has kindly provided a converted 'ride on mower' for members to use to help bring dinghies up the slip. Ken provided a tow hitch while John Walter has been servicing it. Like myself, many do struggle with pulling heavy dinghies up the slip when the tide is out. For those who do want to use it, I suggest they might give a donation to Barry, who has recently replaced both back tyres. While the tractor was awaiting the new tyres, we had to improvise... see below.



A helping hand up the slipway!

Bleeding Diesel Engines

Aleck Poole

To be honest I have had trouble with air bubbles in my fuel on and off for some time. So much so that I have introduced a section of clear pipe so that I can see them chasing each other back to the fuel tank after their visit to the injectors. I have also installed an in-line bulb in the supply line before it enters the first water trap to aid purging the whole system. It saves endless cranking with the starter.

Not all set ups are exactly alike. Mine draws fuel from the top of my tank via a tube which extends into the tank to within two inches off the bottom of the tank. This is to avoid debris and water in the bottom of the tank. There is a small 'well' at the bottom too which can be used to drain off settled water.

From time to time I have found leaks in braided fuel lines and replaced with new from Lee Baxter. I have also found a banjo fitting below my lift pump which has a small filter that accumulated black twiggy bits of growth which developed in the fuel. In May 2018 I had replaced the head gasket with help from John xtb and fuel was flowing fine.

The most recent more serious air bubble situation arose as I was away on the East Coast Cruise leaving Ha' penny Pier, Harwich. Right in the entrance the engine suddenly stopped. I rolled out the jib intent upon sailing across to the shallows opposite to anchor and investigate. A sharp eyed man on the Pier noticed my problem and hailed AMBITION II who had just left ahead of me. Richard took me in tow right out to the Platters buoy whilst I had my head in the engine bay furiously bleeding or tightening every connection and pumping bubbles. There are getting on for 20 possible sources for air ingress on my set up. Once I had a clear flow I let go the tow and motored on; right up to Woodbridge. Solved?

You might have thought so and I'd started and run it several times in Woodbridge, but as I was leaving the Tide Mill at 5:00am there was a sudden silence. I drifted onto a pontoon and chased bubbles..... I stopped again twice outside and picked up two moorings after leaving The Tide Mill until AMBITION II came to the rescue again. Once settled on a mooring at Ramshot I was able to carry on chasing bubbles. I re-seated the main fuel filter and tightened its bracket attached to the rear of the head.

I began to reason that the problem seemed to develop as the engine was left to stand overnight.

My lift pump, operated from a cam on the engine, has an unscrewable top which allows you to pump fuel by hand. Maybe air was entering here. As I pulled off the old seating ring it was obvious that it was severely worn and broke as I removed it. I replaced it with a spare 'O' ring.

Bubbles were once again chased and it seemed to settle down. I restarted several times during the day.

For safety reasons and because I was by now doubting my fuel supply I accepted Richard's tow to leave the Deben.. I kept my engine running in gear and with a slack tow rope proceeded out of the Deben on Saturday morning.

I think I found the solution as the engine has run successfully since. When I'm really sure I'll replace some of those plastic fuel lines. I hope this short piece may help someone else in the future with bleeding diesel issues.

The Gracilda cup

Alice Noble

This race did not start in the water, or at the yard or even in the car. For me the race had started when Steve came bursting into my room with a gleeful grin and sparkling eyes. "There's wind!" I of course in a half asleep state could only assume that he meant he had wind, so I turned

away in disgust. I was then persuaded to get up and get ready to leave for the race.



SEA JAY

I was given an obscene amount of breakfast, brushed my teeth with a bizarre brush. I then doused myself in dry shampoo and sunscreen. I was then prompted into a very hot car and we're off, with the promise of a biscuit. I felt quite content that today Steve will be the tea wench rather than me.

We arrived at the yard in good time, with words of encouraging insults whilst I aimlessly stood on the worryingly wonky pontoon.

In mine, and others opinions, SeaJay is a fine vessel. Comfortable? Accommodating? Certainly. A racer? We shall see.

The horn signaled our start and we were off. Despite being the first boat over the start line, we're soon overtaken by almost everyone. I manage a good couple of tacks and we pick up speed, we briefly debated if we should tack on the bend or keep as we were. We decided not to and stay close to the wind and in Steve's words 'we'd be fine'. We were not fine. We shortly run aground due to the lack of an alarm on the depth gauge and Steve's bad judgment.

Annoyed and deflated I began to watch the seals, whilst Steve took over fruitlessly. We were shortly rescued by a kind group of students, whom one can only assume was seal observing. They pulled us free and we thanked them for their efforts.

As we motored back down the river towards our mooring buoy I held my head high, mostly to see over the cabin roof. We arrived safely back, although I was feeling slightly disappointed and sunburnt, I couldn't be too sad, I did after all have my biscuit to enjoy!

The Winter Series on the Roach??? Tuesday 27th March 2018

Ken Wickham

When you see in the newsletter those who have traveled far into warmer climates think again. You know when a good idea starts to become not You know when a good idea starts to become not such a good idea when you can't see the side banks of the Roach, you can't see 50 feet in front and you can't feel your fingers.

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I/We that's Clem thought leaving LOTUS in for longer this year we might get an extra sail or two in over the Christmas period. The weather really beat us this year but we did get out a few times



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Comes the day when all prearranged we thought we haul her out at Rochford. Weather was turning colder and we had had snow, but with the aid of a paddle MAKEDO was cleared for action, note the sun shine! Temp was around -3 deg C wind chill of -11 deg.

We got out to LOTUS left on B1, we were the only one left on the RMHA moorings, but noticed over our shoulder one big black cloud passing to the South. "Looks ok let's go for it", we were a tad late due to the road traffic and fallen snow, but that's nothing unusual for "Team LOTUS". Cast off leaving the strops attached, pick them up later says the skipper?? Engine started first pull and MAKEDO alongside off we set with 50 mm of snow on the decks.

As we got to Black Ridge Point the weather closed in, Clem Chef of the day ducked inside to put the tea on, most important, get him out of the snow that had just started to really fall. Now I lost sight of the next buoy but that's ok we have depth and a rough direction so we pressed on. It's now falling quite heavy and it's getting colder but we are committed to go on. At Barton Hall Buoy I know we have about 20 mins to go but weather is becoming a problem.



Tea comes up from below, had a delay as there was a problem as the near empty Gaz bottle packed up and had to be changed? Things are getting worse but I managed to find the upper river buoys and we went buoy to buoy into the Yards laid pilot buoys. Near to the withies we could pick out the yard, just hope they are waiting on us!!

The snow is stopping but no mercy as far as the wind. Normally I take Lotus into the transporter stern first, Problem was we were breaking 2 -3" thick Ice flows by the slipway and though she did a reasonable job going ahead but as usual as soon as she was asked to go astern nothing happened. This time we could not push the ice out of the way even with the shallow shaped stern. Seems the River Roach at that point is fresh water thus the Ice flows are thicker



So Into forward motion swing her tight to the dock edge, just missing the concrete wall we lined up to the Transporter, The welcome party of three were there. Nigel, Carl and Lewis, happy as usual but with one slight problem, they could not get any deeper with the hoist due to the ice on the slipway and we would have to ground out just as we got in. Still with the usual yards efficiency and cunning we got pulled ashore. Cradle was already assembled and she went in at the first attempt. No hassle just calm and collected effort and thanks to the yard crew for a very cold stint of work. We celebrated on shore with hot spicy soup and of course fresh baked bacon rolls care of Chef Clem

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East Coast Cruise 2018

John Langrick

The weather had strong N to NE winds forecasted for the start of our East Coast Cruise. As our trip was to the NE, this is not a helpful direction.

However, undeterred, I set off Sat am, to 'throw some diesel' at the first leg to the Blackwater and Pyefleet Creek. Others starting the trip with IMOTHES were RIFF RAFF with Steve and his brother Chris, CORINNE, AMBITION II with Justine and Richard, DESTAYE with Vince and his cousin James., and BELUGA with Rob and his dad Richard. The trip on IMOTHES was unusually quiet for an East Coast Cruise.

SCHERZO with Dave and sons Harry and Luke planned to join us in the Orwell, setting off Sunday.

Upon arriving at Pyefleet it was far too windy, so we headed for Brightlingsea and shelter. We all took the water taxi into the town for a great Indian meal, then back to the boats for 'afters'. I later found out why the VHF had been so quiet, the radio on DESTAYE was not working, and I vowed to fix it this trip, when I get chance.

The BELUGA crew wanted to stay in the Blackwater so set off on their own to Wivenhoe with a plan to dry out on the jetty for a couple of days. Both Rob and his dad have history in that area and wanted to explore old haunts.

The rest of the crews left Brightlingsea on the last couple of hours of the ebb, with a good sail out to the Eagle, but then had to plug north into a head wind. Very uncomfortable, and again quiet, but as I passed the Naze, I was able to make a slant towards Harwich and as we entered the Orwell the wind eased to allow an easy trip to Woolverstone, where I tied up on the linear pontoon as on previous years. Dave's son Harry could not find his sea legs on the trip up the Wallet and was feeling quite ill, so Dave's wife Julie came to collect him



Tied up on the 'G' pontoon at Woolverstone. CORRINE, DESTAYE, SCHERZO, IMOTHES and AMBITION II

We had the usual pilgrimage to the Butt and Oyster and back to the boats for more 'afters'. As the tide ebbed a terrific amount of weed floated down the river totally engulfing our boats which lay across the tide and blocked seacocks. These were cleared with the pump from my Avon. Unfortunately I still had not chance to fix the VHF on DESTAYE.



Anyone for weed?

Dave's son Luke is vegan and had really impressed Vince's cousin James who decided that he too would become vegan. So much for the cooked breakfast Vince was going to prepare!

The following day, I was going to be joined by Graham Pelling who had been returning from holiday with his son that weekend. We had arranged to meet at Ipswich wet dock, so the following day we all sailed to the marina there. There was a Beer Festival in one of the local micro breweries, so we all walked there to sample some ales.. very nice! Then back to AMBITION II for fish and chips for all but the vegans. Unfortunately I still did not find time to fix the VHF on DESTAYE.

On the Tuesday we had a short sail down to Harwich, but on the way, all the ball bearings in the furler on IMOTHES deposited themselves on the foredeck. I managed to furl the sail by taking off the jib sheets, and motoring in tight circles to starboard while the sail wrapped around the forestay. I took an emergency berth in Suffolk Yacht Harbour where I managed to lower the sail and purchase a pack of bearings at the local sailmaker, then joined the rest of the crew on Half-penny pier. With the help of Richard and two of his very large grips, we managed to unscrew the furler and replace the bearings. Job done!

Some of the group were very, very keen on watching the football this night as England were playing in the World Cup. James was dispatched to reserve the large table in the Alma, keeping guard with an ale (or two) at his disposal, he did this admirably. That evening we had an excellent meal while we watched the latest round of the World Cup... and we won! Then back to the boats for 'afters' and I still did not manage time to fix the VHF on DESTAYE.

On the Wednesday we planned to sail to the Deben and Woodbridge where we were to stay two nights. Jonathan would sail to meet us at Woodbridge as the NE wind had abated and would allow him to make the trip completely under sail. CORINNE had fuel problems after leaving Harwich, so accepted a tow from AMBITION II while Aleck worked in the bilges of CORINNE trying to correct the fuel problem.



Woodbridge tide mill, PAKLJHAWA, AMBITION II, SCHERZO, IMOTHES, DESTAYE and CORINNE.

We had an easy sail into the river and up to Woodbridge where the marina staff managed to berth us all together at the end of the west fork. PAKLJHAWA arrived that afternoon and berthed against AMBITION II. We all enjoyed an excellent meal in the Anchor. You would have thought by now I would have found time to fix DESTAYE's VHF, but no.

Thursday was an easy day when Graham and I had a walk up the Deben in very hot sunshine. A long slog past the boatyards at Melton. We were both exhausted by the heat when we reached the bridge but luckily a short walk along from the road we found a pub, with cool ales and delicious snacks. We were really to hot and tired for the walk back so we took a taxi.

The following morning we left Woodbridge with the cruise splitting. SCHERZO, DESTAYE and IMOTHES punched the ebb down the wallet heading for Burnham, while the rest of the fleet dropped down to overnight at Ramsholt.

The tide turned as IMOTHES passed through the Spitway with an easy sail to Burnham. We all had dinner in the Swallowtail that evening for our last night of a great cruise. In the morning I replaced the blown fuse in DESTAYE's VHF and set of back to Paglesham.

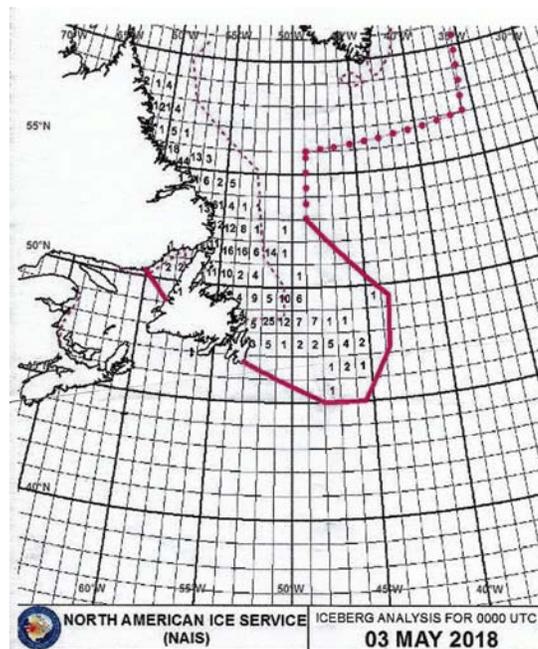
Sheer Terror or Absolute Splendour?

By John Apps

One of the sayings about ocean voyaging states that: 'A single handed ocean passage is 99% boredom intermixed with sheer terror and occasional moments of splendour.' It is not often that you find that what you experienced as 'sheer terror' was in retrospect one of those 'moments of absolute splendour.' For three hours and ten minutes I lived through an experience in mid Atlantic that had my heart in my mouth and my hands hanging on for dear life expecting disaster at any moment.

But what was I doing in mid Atlantic in any case, when sensible sailors were adventuring to Yokesfleet? The 2018 Jester Challenge from Plymouth to Newport, Rhode Island started on the 7th May with 7 boats crossing the starting line although 2 of those didn't do so for a couple of days. One of the first decisions you have to make is which route you will take to cross the North Atlantic. There are various combinations of three potential routes across generally referred to as: Great Circle or Northern, Intermediate and Southern.

I looked at the ice reports from the Canadian Coastguard and decided against the Great Circle route. I had also attempted this route in 2006 and due to excessive winds found my starboard inner shroud was breaking off Newfoundlad and only being able to do port tack came back to the UK fortunately with a favourable north-westerly all the way - 2300 miles.



The intermediate route which I had completed in 2010 had the disadvantage of not only beating into a constant run of low pressure systems driven across by the Jet Stream but also you are stemming the Gulf Stream or Atlantic Drift all the way.

So that left the Southern Route; which meant I would have to sail through the 'Variables' or 'Horse Latitudes.' In 2006 Pete Hill in a junk rigged Kingfisher 22 had used this route to Newport and arrived after 44 days. Maybe it was because my boat Raven was longer or maybe a fore and aft rig isn't as effective as a junk or maybe I am not as good a sailor as Pete Hill but keeping within one degree of Pete's route it took me 53 days, arriving in Newport during the night of 29/30 June, which I was pleased about as I would be there for the 4th July celebrations.



RAVEN at Newport – note blown out headsail on foredeck with spare headsail fitted with UV strip on other side.

RAVEN came second which sounds good but out of the seven starters only two finished. The winner was Tim Luke in MEDUSA a Vancouver 34 he keeps at Whitehaven in Cumbria.

Until my awful fear/moment of splendour the journey back was relatively uneventful. I stopped off at Flores and Terceira in the Azores so I could check back in to Europe, something which is very difficult to do into the UK.

I have often encountered whales and in particular Sperm Whales in and around the Azores and feel when they get to within 50 or even 100 metres that they are a bit close. This time several days north of the Azores I was making a cup of tea when somewhere off to starboard there was a loud expulsion of air. 'What on earth was that?' I asked myself. Thinking perhaps a whole pod of dolphins had surfaced at once next to the boat. Going up and having a look I could see no dolphins. And then next to the boat only a metre away I saw a large whale surface and blow. I couldn't work it out for a while I was so stunned. He or she had two blow holes not the one that I am used to in sperm whales and dolphins. I could only see the portion of the whales back from the blow holes to his/her small fin in the middle of the back.



I was expecting at any moment him/her to lift their tail out of the water and slap the surface as they like to do. But he/she confined herself just to coming up within a metre of the boat and blowing on both beams, astern and in front of the bow sliding under the boat missing the keel and/or rudder by what must have been centimetres. I was hanging on with both hands and yelling 'go away, go away'. The humpback must have thought I was singing to him/her so decided to sing back. The song was very loud and very beautiful. I went below and put on a safety harness and came back into the cockpit and clipped on. I was ready for when he/she did a Moby Dick and rammed the boat. My mind was also on the LUCETTE and the Robertson family who spent so long in a life raft after being wrecked by Killer Whales supposedly.

However the next activity was not a ramming. I caught a long flash of white. I realised the whale had turned over and was now presenting his/her stomach to me or RAVEN I wasn't sure which one of us was the object of interest to the whale.



Not my photo – library footage

At 1200 hours, 2 hours into what then felt like my ordeal, I made my midday log entry and sent off my position by sat phone to a couple of people who seem to take an interest in where I am. A friend, Basil Panakis, who was watching out for hurricanes for me replied that perhaps the whale was just amorous. This didn't help as several pictures flashed through my mind of poor Raven after a non consensual experience.

After completing my log entry I came on deck again to find the humpback was a respectable 500 metres off my starboard quarter. I waved goodbye. To my horror the whale returned and started its imitation of a porpoise playing around the boat again. About 1310 he/she finally decided it had better things to do and swam leaving a very relieved mariner behind. Over three hours of unbelievable stress which in retrospect I realise I would not have missed for the world.



Extracts from AMBITION II Log

Richard and Justine Bessey

For mote see: www.ambition2.org

Barbuda

It was not until Saturday 31st that the weather abated sufficiently, and we were able to motor-sail gently north from Antigua to Barbuda, in company with friends S & A aboard FORTINO. Arriving in the afternoon off the West coast, we carefully followed the contours with the echo-sounder, knowing that the sands would have been shifted by hurricane Irma. We anchored by one of the new breaches to the lagoon and launched the rubber dinghy. The R & A went ashore on the steep beach to explore, but were swamped by waves on landing. The breach was clearly too shallow and wave-swept to cross in the dinghy. And they had a struggle to launch in the surf. Thankfully the outboard started despite the soaking!



Lighthouse Bay resort (remains of)

In the morning both boats moved north along the beach to Low Bay, opposite the ruins of the once-exclusive Lighthouse Bay resort. Here there was another breach, and local boats were seen coming through from the lagoon. However, there was still too much surf for us to try it in the dinghy. We had an enjoyable, sociable time swimming in the clear water, watching the spotted eagle rays swim near the boats and sharing drinks and meals with S and A.

FORTINO's crew had decided to stay in the Caribbean for another season, so they needed to press on south to find a safe place to lay up (south of the hurricane tracks). They sailed early on 2nd April and we waved them off. The surf had gone down so we decided to try for the lagoon. The breach proved easy to navigate in the dinghy and we headed across the lagoon for the town of Codrington, about a mile away.



The frigate bird colony



Back on the quay at Codrington, a boat was loaded with a writhing mass of lobsters in a net, plus a few large fish. They were heading across to Antigua with this little cargo, a long way in such a small skiff. The locals lay piles of sticks in the lagoon to entice and later entrap the lobsters.



First sights of Codrington



Lobster boat



After a walk around the town, where chickens and wild donkeys picked amongst the ruins, we motored back across the lagoon and out through the breach to Ambition II. Later we took another walk on the sandbar, famous for its pink sand with a scattering of coloured shells. The sunset as always was stunning.

We were aware from news reports that there had been controversy over the reconstruction priorities of the Antiguan government and legal action over the status of Barbuda's land ownership, which up until now has been restricted to native Barbudans. Sadly the hurricane disaster has been used as an excuse to allow foreign investors to take a stake in the island.

On arrival, we were met by a scene of devastation. Most buildings were damaged, many beyond repair. Trees and boats had been blown around and still lay scattered and broken. Two aid agency tents had been erected but although children were playing by the shore, few people were around.

It seemed that many of the evacuated population had not returned. The people we met were notably polite and friendly; a close-knit community. We found a shop open and enquired about trips to the frigate bird colony at the north of the island, the Caribbean's largest nesting site for these birds. We were put in touch with a local guide who said he could take us. After waiting some time at the quay, we joined a skiff with 4 other visitors (saving us quite a bit as the fare was shared @ US \$14 each).

The fishing skiff sped us across the lagoon and through shallow channels amongst the mangroves to the frigate bird nest site. The mangroves were badly damaged by the hurricane, all the top half of greenery gone. The surviving birds had flown away but returned to nest in the bare and broken branches at the waters edge. The adults present included only a few adult males still showing their striking red breeding pouches. There was a range of young birds from fluffy white chicks to dark recently fledged juveniles with lighter patches. We were able to get quite close in the skiff without causing any disturbance, a rare sight indeed.



Houses in Codrington

Next day we sailed back to Antigua and headed for Falmouth harbour to meet more friends from the trip south last year.

Dominica

On Saturday the 17th March, we made an early start from the anchorage in St Pierre (Martinique). We had a good easterly wind for the passage to Dominica but were in wind shadow until a gentle westerly took us along the Dominican west coast. We could see what appeared to be widespread hurricane damage to the rain forest, with a lot of bare trees and landslides in the mountains. We sailed past the capital Roseau and proceeded to Prince Rupert bay.



Portsmouth, Prince Rupert bay

The local boatmen have formed a consortium, PAYS, to provide moorings and other services and we ended up on one of their moorings after a false start on a temptingly large mooring, which turned out to be private. We were not far from the beach, opposite the roofless ruins of a hotel.



Roofless, like many buildings in Dominica

The Indian River winds through the swamp to spill into Prince Rupert Bay. The PAYS office fixed us a guide to row up the river next morning. We had some trouble getting hold of PAYS next day, but were eventually given a lift in a skiff to the river entrance. Here we had to go to a nearby garage to get a permit, then went up Indian river in the guide's boat. He pointed out the different trees, green iguana and various birds (green heron, egret, bananaquit etc) and explained the damage done by the hurricane. He had cleared many trees himself, to make the river accessible. At a cafe- stop, we chatted over a beer to the guide and barman about their experiences of the hurricane & the local people's skill in surviving the appalling experience. The river has clearly changed a lot, with many large trees gone, but it was still interesting.



Shattered rain forest up the Indian River

That evening, we went to the PAYS barbecue along with over 50 other cruising sailors. This was a friendly affair featuring grilled fish, chicken, rice & salad, well lubricated with as much rum punch (or fruit juice) as you could drink. We rowed boldly away afterwards, taking a rather circuitous route to our boat!



Mangrove swamp, Indian River

2018 Editor's picture selection – closer to home!



Rafting up at the Fambridge rally



John Walter in his new boat PUFFIN sailing to the Fambridge Rally



Simon, with Dave Pearce and Jonathan, sailing down from Sutton Wharf, ready for racing.



Nick Turner and son Zane at the East Coast weekend (Burnham)



Robin Slater's HANDY LASS sailing at Paglesham