

Little Grebe - Boys Week 2017

Having a trailer sailor has some advantages and in the weeks before this year's trip several possible plans were discussed. In the end the unavailability of a craned lift out led us to the decision that we would sail around the coast, see where we got to and trailer back if need be.

Friday 21st July was to be departure day. An afternoon HW gave us the opportunity to reach Wells or Blakeney as a first port of call but as the day approached the forecast repeatedly had F5/6 in it with winds from the North. The crew of Flamingo (Phill & Tony) were keen to leave but Little Grebe (Nigel & Adrian) made the decision to delay by 24 hours.

Saturday 22nd July - Brancaster to Blakeney

With a slightly improved forecast the Moon brothers made the decision to give it a go. Last minute provisions were walked out and we were in a position to leave just as soon as there was water under us.



With HW at 18.30 we did well to get an early departure at 16.30 by leaving the mooring with the outboard only. The rudder and keel were quickly sorted but halfway to the Fairway an ominous line of cloud quickly produced a significant squall with strong wind and rain. Visibility was poor and we dropped anchor off the beach. Unfortunately, on return to the cockpit after anchor duties, the 1st mate's fingers met with the hatch being hastily closed to keep things dry. So - 10 minutes into the trip and we had progress halted and the 1st aid kit was brought into action. The squall cleared through and we decided to put our nose out to check the sea state. Although it was a lumpy wet ride up the fairway conditions improved and we decided to head East as planned with No3 reef in. The wind eased and by the time we liaised with Flamingo, who had spent 24 hours in Wells, we had full sail and began to realise we were off on our trip - almost as planned. Blakeney appeared and the skipper confidently entered East of the wreck having sailed in a couple of weeks earlier for a

pleasant weekend cruise. At 20.15 Flamingo anchored ahead of us and we attempted to move further ahead for more shelter. With a big swell for our smaller boat we needed considerable scope and this left us close to a buoy, the bank and bemused seals. Our 2nd attempt was more successful and Flamingo assured us it wouldn't be this rough all night. We ate simple meal for two and were early to bed.

15NM

Sunday 23rd July – Blakeney to Lowestoft

Our planned departure at 05.00 gave us some foul tide for an hour but we would benefit as we went 'round the bend'. Light SE winds suggested we might need the extra fuel carried on board but by 09.45 the wind had increased to a pleasing SW3 (sorry Anthony, that looks like a Chelsea postcode!) We had arrived at Sea Palling - the furthest Little Grebe had ever ventured. Now - do we turn back or go for the big trip. Calling up Flamingo on VHF quickly confirmed that we all felt it fine to continue and they offered to wait for us if necessary. For the technically minded the Parker 235 is slower than the 275 in any decent wind but does rather better keeping up in light winds. True to form the crew of Flamingo kept half an eye on us during the week. Thanks Phill.

Pleased to have successfully navigated through the pots off Cromer we pressed on as planned. The wind increased to F4/5 but with a comfortable sea progress was good and we were off Waxham at 12.00hr. Skipper and mate, happy in each other's company, took turns on the helm and became expert at cups of tea and ships cake.



As we arrived at North Scroby the speed over the ground began to drop until off Great Yarmouth (13.30) we were motor sailing with 2 knots of adverse current. Following Flamingo down the marked channel inside Scroby Sands it was interesting to watch another yacht close inshore slowly overhaul us. Something to consider another time perhaps? Having sailed into Lowestoft a number of times with other Brancaster Cruisers the skipper had some experience of the lumpy entrance. Secretly hoping the outboard had enough grunt to follow the previous Cruiser Captain's advice - 'just go for the middle as fast as possible - there's room to stop inside' - all went well without even getting wet. We entered the Royal Norfolk at 16.05 but there was no evidence of the staff who promised to come down and direct us to our berths. What followed was a curious dance of two pirouetting Parker Seals. Little Grebe was the first to leave the dance floor realising that we should have taken 3rd right not 2nd right to get round the back amongst the small boats under the gaze of fish & chip laden amusement goers. We

had a slight touch of bottom and lifted some keel but despite that executed a nice entrance into our berth.

Feeling pleased with our achievements we rewarded ourselves with beers in the sunshine. Quite coincidental that the skipper then offered to show his brother the famous copper and brass urinals everyone talks about! We had a relaxing evening on Flamingo enjoying the excellent cooked provisions sent by various wives all washed down by a nice Merlot.

53NM

Monday 24th July - Lowestoft to River Deben

Our planned departure at 07.00 saw us (unusually) leave before Flamingo. They claimed they were waiting for us to leave first! A steady SW F3 was ideal and we made good progress to NE Whiting by 11.00hrs. Following some success with the asymmetric spinnaker this season it was decided to fly it today. The 1st attempt saw it twisted - how can that be if it's packed carefully? The 2nd attempt saw us lose the spring clipped sheets resulting in the East Coast's largest burgee of the day. Rapidly putting it to bed, we hoped Flamingo ahead of us hadn't seen our exploits - they had! By 12.35, approaching Woodbridge Haven Buoy, the rain had arrived. The skipper had some doubts about the outboard's capability to enter the narrow entrance to the River Deben but all went well and we picked up two swinging moorings just South of Ramsholt. The German yacht upstream seemed amused as we hoisted our anchor light, pumped up our dinghy and set off with head torches on. Another pleasant evening followed - 3 nights out in Boy's Week and still no visit to a pub!

39NM

Tuesday 25th July - River Deben to River Stour

It was nice to have a leisurely breakfast and tidy before departing down river at 11.30hr. Arriving at Felixstowe Ferry a little early on the last of the flood tide saw us depart very slowly. We were matching the dog walkers on the beach but had little power to spare and no time to relax as there were a significant number of boats entering. A working boat chose to manoeuvre in front of us giving us very little space. Once clear of the river whilst sail trimming it became apparent that the Jib furler was jammed as it refused to roll away. The 1st mate skilfully helmed off the wind broadly in a Southerly direction whilst the skipper sat astride the bow painstakingly unwinding and rethreading the line. With the problem solved, a quick lunch was followed by some serious sailing in order to catch Flamingo seen disappearing South over the previous hour. We crossed the Felixstowe Channel uneventfully at Rolling Ground Buoy to pick up the recommended yacht track with Flamingo at 14.00. We enjoyed some close tacking up the River Orwell entrance before heading West up the River Stour. This proved to be a delightful stretch of water but we vainly attempted to catch Flamingo whilst consuming afternoon tea and cake. After turning back at 15.45 and a quick chat on VHF we agreed to try Shotley Marina.



Flamingo's skipper had recent experience of the lock and insisted it was easy to use. All went well through the lock and, despite a tricky wind, Little Grebe confidently approached the allotted berth - perhaps a little too reliant on reverse engine thrust but Phill's excellent snubbing of the midship line made the process look smooth and no gelcoat was harmed in the process!



16.30 saw us secure and a pleasant evening followed with the two boats alongside each other. Decision made - make tomorrow an easy day river sailing.

18NM

Weds. 26th July - Shotley Marina to Levington!

Our 10.30 departure into the lock ahead of Flamingo went well despite a stiff breeze across the entrance. Snugly secure on the windward side we thought we'd left plenty of room behind and opposite us but we were asked to move forward. What followed was not Brancaster Boats finest hour as first we had to accept the wind putting us on the opposite side (luckily fenders were down) and then Flamingo struggled to get a line ashore leading to the bold and sensible decision to reverse out and try again. Once out, the short motor to Shotley Point enabled us to tidy up before setting sail up river. With little traffic and a strong but steady breeze just two hours later we were taking photo opportunities under the Orwell Bridge.



The wind had strengthened slightly but become rather gusty at times and this, coupled with less room in the channel up river from the bridge led us to the decision that it was time to return downriver. An exciting tack past The Royal Harwich Yacht Club seemed to put us on collision course with something at every turn. The trip boat coming down river felt he owned the river and my attempt to hold my course as 'Stand On' vessel clearly wasn't working – we took the cowards way out - sorry Phill!

13.30 Flamingo felt the need to train the crew, repeatedly picking up a mooring under sail. We felt the need to pick one up to enjoy a nice lunch and snooze! The view across to Pin Mill was delightful. The snooze proved costly as Flamingo crept away down river. We caught up at Suffolk Yacht Harbour, Levington. By 17.00 the crew of Flamingo were rested and eager to walk up the river path to the Ship Inn. 'Just a short walk' they said. This skipper reluctantly (honest) agreed and despite the threat of rain we arrived dry. A couple of pints of Ghost Ship each and there was a moment when the pleasant atmosphere made it look as if this was our resting place for the evening.

We were strong willed and returned to enjoy excellent fish and chips at the Lightship clubhouse in the marina. The menu was somewhat limited and unfortunately we bumped into the chef/manager who took a very long time to explain that ventilation in the kitchen wasn't as it should be and .. the parts bought on ebay weren't correct and..parts were coming from the USA and..he couldn't risk cooking anything else and.. I can't remember the rest!

14NM

Thursday 27th July - Levington to Lincoln

The plan was to haul Little Grebe out and trail her home. The 1st mate had a train to catch in Ipswich and so our 'small car' arrived from Lincoln. The 1st mate was dropped at the station and the skipper and wife returned home. Flamingo seemed happy to rest a while.

Friday 28th - Lincoln to Levington

The skipper set off early in the 'big car' with trailer attached and was back in the marina by lunchtime. The wind was blowing strongly and there was some doubt whether it would be possible to lift out Little Grebe. The skipper of Flamingo, understandably, prefers not to get involved with other people's cars and trailers on slipways; the usual routine is for him to helm, so the decision was a joint one. The wind eased; the tide was good and a snap decision was made. Using his favoured strong wind tactic of reversing to avoid being blown off the wind Little Grebe was delivered to the slipway. An extended hawser with hitch and ball is a useful aid as the car goes nowhere near the water. The mast came down quite well and the rest of the day was spent tidying and securing for the road trip. The following morning after a splendid breakfast on Flamingo it was time for us to depart leaving the skipper of Flamingo to await the arrival of his new crew before moving on to Belgium and Holland.

Perhaps another year we'll start at Levington – we shall see!



139NM (160 miles home by road!)

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