

Clover's East Coast Adventure



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"Congratulations you are now the proud owners (proud we were because Clover is a lovely boat) of a Vancouver 27". With these words from the broker our thoughts immediately turned to how we were going to get her from the River Crouch in Essex to the Moray Firth. I turned to Caireen and said 'we'll sail her up it will be an adventure'. East or West - not a decision we had to make immediately - with two months holiday in the summer we had the time for either.

A week later, another exciting event in our lives, we found out we were going to have baby and the nature of the adventure changed. Caireen was still happy for Clover to sail up and we reasoned that by the summer the pregnancy should have settled down although it would not be wise for Caireen to sail in such a potentially hostile environment. However we had a friend who had been happy to come as a third member of the crew and she was still willing to sail Clover double handed. I was happy with this as we bought the Vancouver as an ideal boat to sail short or single handed. As we approached home Caireen would be able to join us to explore the area around some of the harbours.

East coast it was, it was much shorter than sailing round the South and West coasts, and I didn't want to be away from Caireen for too long. I also thought it was my one opportunity to sail the East coast of Britain. Who would want to return to the East coast when some of the World's best cruising waters lay off the West coast of Scotland?

A number of challenges presented themselves with the venture.

The first of these was preparing the boat for the trip when we lived six hundred miles away.

I went down in May for a week and lived on board Clover getting used to the space, checking her inventory and storing equipment appropriately, checking the electronics and trying out systems that were new to me like the chart plotter and Navtex and making a list of things I thought I should do or get. Antifouling was applied and the paintwork smartened up. All the time the weather was wonderful and I felt as though I should be sailing and maybe I had missed a good opportunity to get under way. This feeling was eased in the knowledge that I would be sailing to St Kilda with Miles and Susannah in their Rival later in the month all being well. However it was a valuable time to spend on the boat and I felt better prepared for Clover's maiden voyage, for which there was no turning back once started. Then immediately before setting off Caireen and I went down for a few days to launch Clover, have the engine serviced, provision her and do all those endless little jobs. Again the weather was very hot but this time also very windy and we were unable to take Clover for a trial sail other than a brief motor out of the marina and through the moorings on the Crouch one calm evening and then the next day to the fuelling pontoon.

Doing such a trip as her maiden voyage, I had no doubts about Clover's ability as a sailing boat for such a trip but I am never as confident to rely upon an engine which I would potentially need much more than if I was sailing on the west coast.

The navigation in waters that were mainly new to me, especially around the Thames Estuary, the Wash, the Farne Islands, and the Forth Estuary. Most of the passage would be in a northerly direction close to the shore, often less than a mile from land if the wind was the prevailing south westerly which was also the most favourable wind for sailing most of the East coast. Most of the time this would require ticking off the villages or other landmarks as we passed them. The other parts required detailed navigation not only in terms of position but also of tidal heights in the shallow waters off the East coast. I did a lot of research before I left. I obtained detailed charts of the areas of concern, downloaded the most up to date chartlets for entering the more tidal rivers. The Findhorn entrance is just an average example of one of these but there are several which the pilot books would

make the Findhorn seem straightforward by comparison! The best and most useful pilot book was that produced by the Royal Northumberland YC covering from the Humber to Peterhead. Others I used were the Imray pilots for the East Coast and the Northeast Coasts. On board I had a fixed Garmin gps down below that was also linked to a chart plotter for transferring positions to a paper chart once they had all been calibrated. On deck I had a hand held memory map gps with admiralty charts and ordnance survey maps downloaded. The most useful device however was my ipad 3 for which I had bought a gps dongle and downloaded the most up to-date Navionics charts, showing all the wind farms etc. and 1:50000 Ordnance Survey maps. This I could have up on deck plugged into a cigarette charger on an extended lead and this gave me a continuous display and plot of my position, as well as tidal information and currents etc. as well as my SOG. It also allowed me to zoom in and out seamlessly while entering tricky ports or anchorages. I was also able to plot my intended course for the day with appropriate waypoints. I had tried it out on Miles' boat on the trip to St Kilda where the up to date charts proved their worth showing buoys on the tricky passage through Leverburgh sound that were missing from the Admiralty Charts that were only a few years old!

The weather is a constant source of concern for any sailing. The east coast ports are very exposed particularly in strong easterlies and entry for nearly all may become extremely dangerous. For this reason one must be prepared to stay at sea for an extended period as a plan B. Caireen and I loaded up a variety of cans as emergency rations should this happen. However although the winds were predominantly from the North and East they remained light enough, without the build up of a significant swell and I was not restricted by the weather to enter any of my ports or anchorages which had enough variation in angle to allow me to choose one and to enter without any problems. One of the consequences of the easterlies which I did not enjoy was the potential for fog and this did materialise on a number of occasions. Without a radar to see shipping in these conditions I would have to treat it with respect.

Planning the legs between harbours/anchorages as entry to many of the harbours is only possible 2/3 hours either side of high water. This means that a day's sailing window is a minimum of (6)/8 hours and a maximum of 16/(18) hours so legs had to be planned accordingly. On top of this it was only realistic to leave some of the rivers on the ebb and enter on the flood thus shortening the day. As most of the legs varied in length between 30 and 50 miles I was hoping to maintain an average SOG of about 4 knots. On a beam reach in 15-18 knots of wind Clover was capable of 6.5 knots. This she achieved, and more, at times with a favourable tide but if the wind dropped or came from an unfavourable direction or with an adverse tide it necessitated the use of the engine. July weather wise was one of the best on record, and while I basked in glorious sunshine in shirt sleeves aboard Clover, and only donned the oilies once, as I approached Findhorn, the winds were often light and from the North and I ended up motor sailing more than I would have wished for.

These are potentially long days so another problem was to make sure that the day started and ended at a reasonable time. One factor in favour of a south to north passage was that as you headed north high water became earlier. So on a typical leg of 30-40 miles high water times would apparently remain the same time from day to day. So once in a cycle of starting at eight in the morning this would remain the start time. The other factor in favour was that the considerable currents (1-3 knots) in the North Sea would usually be favourable for the first 5-6 hours



Day 1 - Fambridge Marina to the north entrance of the River Roach anchorage. 9.3 nm, 2 hr 19 min.

We picked up Barbara, my crew for the first part of the trip, from Fambridge rail station at about 14.00, whisked her down to the boat for lunch before showing her over the boat and giving her some basic operating procedures. Barbara is a long standing friend, who had just retired, that very weekend, from teaching Modern Languages at Winchester College. She was an experienced sailor having completed many, sometimes epic adventures, with her husband and three boys on the West Coast in their Drascombe, although she had limited experience on bigger yachts which do present different challenges. It was then time to top up on water in the tanks, a final tidy up and check before sitting down to an early supper in order to catch the top of the tide so we could sail down to the River Roach to put us within striking distance of the open sea.

It was a lovely warm sunny evening with a fresh 15 knot breeze from the west as we motored through the mud banks out of the marina onto the more open waters of the River Crouch. Once through the moorings the main was hoisted and the jib unfurled as we enjoyed a lovely broad reach down the river. Caireen was there to take pictures of Clover's maiden sail under new ownership.



We sped, through the twists and turns of the river with a favourable tide and wind, through the moorings at Burnham on Crouch, past numerous sandbanks, with impunity at the top of the tide, and in no time at all approached the entrance of the River Roach. Giving Horse Shoal and Brankfleet Spit an unnecessary wide berth we turned South into the Roach, switched on the engine, furled the jib and stowed the main. Some ominous dark clouds were looming over the western horizon, blocking out the setting sun, as we prepared the anchor. We were sharing the anchorage with another two yachts and settled for a position between the two of them in about 3 metres of water at chart datum. Barbara was at the helm while I manned the anchor. We dropped 20 metres of chain and 10 metres of warp to allow for the rise and fall of the tide and the 4 knot currents expected in the river.

The sky was now overcast, the wind still fresh and the light fast fading. The anchor was dragging, no doubt about it. Why? - surely the tackle was man enough with Essex mud abetting even for these currents. The anchor had to come up. Caireen always said I was puny but surely I could manage a 25lb anchor and 20 metres of 8 mm chain! But no - it wasn't budging despite dragging. Barbara motored forward a bit. At last it was coming but felt enormously heavy. It was slow progress but at last in the torchlight the reason became apparent - there was a huge sheet of heavy duty plastic (4x4metres) clattered in good Essex mud, wrapped round the anchor. Getting this aboard in the dark was some job, Clover's lovely clean top sides and deck becoming covered in mud. Once aboard we set about the process of anchoring again - perfect. The anchor set, we swung overnight through 180 degrees as the tide turned and she held fine. The occasional check as we approached the strongest parts of the ebb and flood reassured the skipper that all was well. We still had the problem of what to do with the sheet of plastic, gifted us no doubt by some container ship or farmer. We couldn't just toss it back in the sea, although there were probably plenty more from wherever it had come - another uncontrollable concern for the yachtie. We cleaned it off as best we could and folded it up as small as possible before stuffing it into the starboard cockpit locker where it blocked access to most other gear!

A fabulous first sail during which Clover lived up to expectations. An interesting conclusion to the day which gave food for thought. I was sure that this wouldn't be the last problem Clover encountered on her adventure to her new home in the Moray Firth, but it was one I hadn't anticipated. But there again the fun of sailing is rising to the unexpected challenge.

Day 2 The River Roach to the River Orwell (Pinmill) anchorage 42.2 nm 10 hr 32 min.

The day dawned fine, warm and sunny with a gentle breeze still from the west. It was an early start as we weighed anchor at 07.00 to maximise the benefit of the ebb tide out of the rivers Roach and Crouch following the channel buoys out into the open sea and past the Whittaker sandbanks where there is now an enormous wind farm - just one of many encountered on the trip.

The wind and tide should take us well beyond Gunfleet Sand where we would turn north and have to put up with the early adverse tide before we could turn west towards Harwich at

which point, although the wind might now be against we would have the flood tide taking



us into the entrance of the River Stour and Orwell and all the way to that night's anchorage near Pinmill.

We were sailing through waters sailed by Erskine Childers, famous for his book 'The Riddle of the Sands'. A fine sail it was. As the wind lightened past the Whittaker and Gunfleet sandbanks we were able to maintain speed as we trialled the spinnaker. Borrowed from Tiare, it was a little small (but too big for Tiare in all but the lighter winds!) and I had to make up an improvised up haul/down haul for the spinnaker pole using the staysail halyard and a pulley system that I had on board for a variety of jobs. We could have used the cruising chute but it would not have set as well on a dead run, being shielded by the main, as the spinnaker which could be pulled across opposite the main. I



was pleased I had brought the spinnaker and that we had got to use it so early in the trip.

As anticipated as we turned into Harwich the course turned into a beat. The wind picked up to 18 knots and we put in a reef. Clover sailed along very comfortably. The wind started to back a little and we were able to sail along the recommended line alongside the shipping channel without having to tack. Harwich was interesting

being a busy port with the ferry traffic and container ships, but to west the rural Suffolk

landscape with church spires punctuating the skyline. Surprisingly we encountered little boat traffic as we crossed the shipping lane and with a favourable 12 knot breeze we reached up the Orwell. This was the setting for Arthur Ransome's book, 'We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea' - part of his 'Swallows and Amazons' series. We anchored just below Pinmill where Ransome himself set off on a voyage across the North Sea in his own boat the *Nancy Blackett* while researching the novel. It was a lovely peaceful setting, bright poppy fields glowing in the evening light set amongst



verdant green fields and little villages, an old Thames Barge on her mooring just downstream of us. Unlike the previous night it was a peaceful night at her anchorage. Just



as well as it was another early start to catch the tide out of the Orwell on her next leg. I would have loved to have stayed longer in this area and explored some of the rivers such as the Deben, Ore and Alde. They had filled me with a healthy respect as the pilots had informed of their hazardous entrances, but now in hindsight and with a little more experience with Clover I would have relished the challenge and the sailing through the Suffolk countryside

Day 3 The River Orwell to Lowestoft 52.1 nm, 10hr 15min

We weighed anchor at 09.45. The wind was light and from the east so we motored back down the Orwell, crossed the shipping lane at the entrance to the River Stour before turning the corner to head east past Harwich before crossing the main shipping channel. It was another lovely day but little traffic. We headed in a NE direction following the coast about a mile off. Navigation was straightforward, and a matter of ticking off the landmarks as we passed them. We passed Felixstowe Ferry, known because of their team racing prowess in my student days, the entrances to the Deben and the Alde, both places I would have loved to visit. There lies the dilemma of the cruising sailor. It may seem we have all the time in the world as we idly drift along at 4 knots but the reality, even in retirement, is that there are always deadlines - tide gates for the next port, dropping off/picking up the crew and more distantly the birth of my daughter. More immediately the forecast for the next 3/4 days was for 30 mph winds so I was keen to get tied up in Lowestoft in relative shelter. True both the Deben and the Alde offered shelter but a long way up the rivers and I did not think the anchorages closer to the sea, that I would have selected, would have offered suitable shelter in the flat Suffolk landscape. So on we went, past Orford Ness Light and Aldeburgh thinking of Britten's *Sea Interludes* so evocative of the seascape we were passing through. In stark contrast Sizewell Nuclear Reactor floated in the heat haze and then on to Southwold. All the time the wind was fickle so it was on and off with the engine as we tried to maintain reasonable progress. By 19.30 we were approaching Lowestoft. The apprehension of entering an unfamiliar Marina in a new unfamiliar boat was palpable. This was my first marina of the trip and I didn't want to get it wrong. However by 20.00 we were tied up alongside a raft of bigger boats at the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk YC



without incident. I had learned that providing you had planned ahead and took things gently Clover was very well behaved and gave you time to execute your plan without undue stress! The Vancouver is not a marina boat, but a boat for the open sea but not once did she give me cause for concern when entering or

leaving the unfamiliar marinas I visited on the rest of the trip.

The forecast was right. For the next three days we sat it out at the RNSYC. Life in a marina is strange. There we were caged in a few square metres of water, pontoons and Tarmac with tens, possibly hundreds of millions of pounds of marine real estate. The obligatory dress into the clubhouse in the evenings was jacket and tie, thankfully relaxed a little as the Squib National Championships was taking place. You walk through the locked gate into the real world of a rather run down port which used to have a thriving fishing fleet, but no more. It feels a bit like being in the British Embassy in some far flung outpost of the British Empire! We whiled away the time walking along the promenade, watching the surfers between the breakwaters, visited Oulton Broad where the police divers were doing a search for an unfortunate who did not make it back to his boat from the pub. Another day we visited a pleasant maritime museum and met up with the crew from a Dutch boat who were intending to take their boat through the Forth and Clyde canal and experience the delights of the Falkirk Wheel. The skipper had modified his mast himself so that it could be lowered single handed to go under bridges, a common occurrence in the waters around Holland. His record time for lowering it was 3 seconds when he had forgotten to tie the halyard off before telling his crew to give it a wee push. It narrowly missed him as he awaited its lowering into the crutch at the stern.



In all this time we did not of course see the Squib fleet sailing as they were winded off on all but one day which was so foggy they disappeared in the murk before they got out of the harbour entrance. It was impressive however to see them sailing out of the marina - I'm sure Clover could do it!! Needless to say they couldn't see each other out at sea with some disastrous consequences. The final night was a pleasant affair watching the semi finals of the World Cup cheering on the Dutch Team as there seemed to be a flotilla of Dutch boats in the harbour.

Day 4/5 Lowestoft to Scarborough 140.0 nm 34 hr 15 min

This was the longest leg of the trip by far and potentially the most challenging. Beyond Great Yarmouth it was essentially the open sea with no other easily accessible harbours without entering the tricky waters and sandbanks of the Wash where there would have been some interesting anchorages/harbours but this would have required quite a long detour into the Wash and extended the trip unnecessarily. On top of this the weather still seemed uncertain following the recent storms. Another alternative was to enter the Humber where there were good marinas but again this was a detour and the hazards of busy shipping lanes and strong tidal currents were not offset by the lure of Grimsby as the City of Culture that year. So Scarborough it was. I also had friends there to look up if time permitted.

We set off at 06.30 into a rather gloomy sea with patches of mist but light winds. Throughout this leg it was a case of motoring or motor sailing as the wind never really filled in from a suitable direction. We passed Great Yarmouth, ticked off various navigational buoys and saw the occasional ship loom out of the patchy mist. Some stretches with the tide behind us we were doing 7 knots but we always knew that sooner or later we would have the same tide against us when it would be difficult to maintain more than 2-3 knots.



As the day progressed rather than the mist burning off it persisted and we knew we were probably in for a rather oppressive night sail, foghorn handy and 2 hour watches with a rather restless sleep in between. By midnight we were in the middle of the seas off the Wash at probably our furthest point, of about 30 miles, from land for the entire trip. With poor visibility our senses were stretched to the limit. Peering into the gloom for any lights,

straining to hear the noise of an engine. Usually I enjoy night sailing but the poor visibility meant that this was anything but enjoyable. About 06.00 I heard the sound of a foghorn but could see nothing. I responded with our foghorn. I heard their foghorn several more times meanwhile I contacted the coastguard, gave them my position, to ask if they were able to give me the position of any large ships in the area using their AIS. They reported back that there was one vessel but its course seemed to be crossing clear astern of us and gave us its position. I was reassured that it seemed to be several miles astern of us.



The morning was very still with glassy seas and a large red sun occasionally making its presence felt through a thin low sea mist. Gannets flew to and fro and I began to enjoy the atmospheric conditions although I was still a little anxious about visibility. By 10.00 we were approaching Flamborough Head and the mist had cleared and it was a glorious day. Flamborough Head looked good with interesting geological formations. I should have stopped here for elevenes and spent a bit of time ashore but we

were both tired and keen to press on. Instead we anchored in Filey Bay for lunch awaiting the tide to get into Scarborough. Eventually we arrived at Scarborough at 16.45 the day after we left Lowestoft.





Day 6 Scarborough to Whitby 18.3 nm 7 hr 3 min

After the Wash which was the longest leg of the trip we deserved a bit of a rest and this was the shortest leg of the trip. Having visited Scarborough Castle the evening before and having waited to see if my friend would turn up we had a leisurely start at 09.00. I found out that we had just missed her, but I needed to press on as I was picking up a friend at Hartlepool. Peter was an ex colleague who used to help me run the sailing at school and was going to join us for a few days. The day was sunny and bright, the fog all gone. The wind was light and not always in the right direction but we had time to spare on this short leg to await the tidal gate into Whitby. So we mainly sailed using what ever combination of sails was appropriate and ticked off the landmarks, past Robin Hood Bay where we should probably have stopped for some lunch and arrived at Whitby soon after 16.00. That



evening we had a gentle stroll up to the Abbey and on along the coast with some fine cliffs. On our way back we noticed several rowing skiffs in the harbour and a group of about 20 primary school aged children all kitted out in life jackets dangling their fishing lines over the harbour wall. Whitby harbour was not as pretty as Scarborough but it was obviously well used by the locals which was good to see.

Day 7 Whitby to Hartlepool 27.0 nm 9 hr 10 min



At 07.50 we radioed bridge control and by 08.00 we were motoring out of Whitby through the bridge. As we exited the harbour and came to the open sea a fresh NNW wind awaited us. We hoisted the main and unfurled the jib and set off at a lively pace. After a while we put in a single reef and Clover was much more comfortable in 18 knots of breeze. We were making excellent progress and as we drew level with Runswick Bay we decided to bear away into the bay and dropped the anchor under sail. We rowed

ashore in the dinghy and spent a few hours exploring the picturesque bay.



I met a lovely family shrimping in the bay which reminded me of my own childhood holidays trekking miles across the endless sands of The Wash with my father, brother and a shrimp net in hand catching shrimps, cockles, dabs and plaice.



Back to the boat for lunch. We then headed off in lighter backing winds, and it was soon time to put up the cruising chute on a dead run without the main which would have taken the wind out of the cruising chute. Again we made good progress and in no time at all we were passing Middlesbrough and approaching Hartlepool. Through the lock into the marina where Peter was awaiting us. We sat down to a good supper on deck in glorious sunshine and were entertained by a young girl on the

rooftop of some modernistic building being sought out by the security guards. Eventually they got her but I hope didn't reward her adventurous spirit with anything more than a warning.

Day 8 Hartlepool to Blyth 30.2nm 8 hr 0 min

This was one of the less interesting sections of coast passing Sunderland and the Tyne. The wind however promised to be good as we cast off from the pontoon and entered the lock where we had a bit of trouble getting the stern line ashore but a good throw of the line resolved the problem. We were out of the lock by 10.30 and heading out to sea under motor. We started off on starboard tack on a lively broad reach with a single reef in the sail and the jib unfurled. Once out in open water we gybed onto port and settled down to a dead run, with the preventer on the boom, and a course parallel to the coast about a mile off. By 12.00 we had shaken out the reef. By 15.00 the wind had dropped to 10 mph and the cruising chute was up. At 16.30 in an increasing wind we took down the cruising chute. By 17.30 we were entering Blyth. Half an hour later we were all tied up alongside. The Royal Northumberland Yacht Club based at Blyth were hosting the East Coast Sailing Week and a barbeque was in full swing to which we were invited to join in. They were a friendly club with the clubhouse based on an old boat. They also produce an excellent pilot for much of the east coast of Scotland and England which they obviously treat as their home cruising waters.



Day 9 Blyth to Amble 19.4 nm 10 hr 15 min

An early rise to see Barbara off as she was taking the train up to Edingburgh to meet up with one of her sons who was driving down in her car from the north west. Peter and I had time for a reasonably leisurely breakfast before leaving the pontoon under engine and following the river out to sea. By 08.15 the main was hoisted and the Jib unfurled and we were making a leisurely 3-4 knots on a beam reach in a gentle SW breeze of 5-8 knots.



We soon had the cruising chute up. Heading towards Newbiggin Point, we passed some more wind turbines, and as we approached the point, with a view to look at anchorages in the River Wansbeck or Newbiggin Bay for a brief stop and coffee we were joined by a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins. They cavorted under the bows of the boat and breached right out of the water on a number of occasions. Although we see

them so much in the Moray Firth they are always a pleasure to see. We decided to stay on course round the point so that we could enjoy their company and headed towards Coquet



Island. By mid-day the wind had dropped away and it was time for the engine and to bring the cruising chute down. An hour later we anchored in fairly open water to the NW of Coquet Island and enjoyed a pleasant lunch watching rafts of puffins drift past the boat and clouds of terns over the island. It would have been nice to have landed on the island but this is not allowed. It is clearly an important site for nesting birds. On this leg the wildlife was beginning to become abundant and interesting and so it was to remain for the rest of the trip. We weighed anchor at 17.30, having waited for the tide in order to comfortably clear the bar into Amble. By 18.15 we were safely alongside the pontoon in

Amble Marina. We enjoyed a pleasant pub supper enjoying the last of the sun at our outdoor table. The end of a very pleasant and leisurely day.

The forecast was not good with a lot of fog. So although the morning was fine we decided not to head off as the next section was the Farne Islands to the East Neuk of Fife which promised to be the most interesting of the trip as far as I was concerned - really the reason for doing the East Coast route. Peter had to leave the next day anyway so an anchorage would not suit. We had a leisurely morning before he caught the bus home. This proved to be a good decision as I was fogbound in Amble for 3 days.



I enjoyed relaxing in the town where everyone was very friendly. The post office allowed me to use their internet connection where I was able to catch up on mail, weather forecasts and face booking a few pictures of the trip so far and other essentials. They even posted back my charging lead, which I left there, having tracked me down via the marina. I popped into a good old fashioned store to buy a brush for the boat. It was a real Aladdin's Cave. It was a maze of shelving crammed with stock with hardly any room to walk around and yet it was full of people who obviously realised that whatever they wanted in their wildest dreams they would find it there. A maze it was and amazed I was! A walk up the river to the castle seeing egrets on the way, and back down the other side to the beach where I spent the afternoon photographing the flora and fauna.



Sorting out the boat and replacing the fuel in the outboard which I had inadvertently let some water get into. Next time I tried to use it I found that the shear pin had broken. I must remember to take a spare next time although I managed perfectly adequately rowing which I enjoy much more.

Time was spent cooking some nice meals and always plenty to do. Amble would make a good base for an even longer stay to visit the surrounding area.

Day 10 Amble to Farne Islands (The Kettle anchorage) 23.7 nm 5 hr 15 min

After two days of mist it finally dawned clear with a light northerly wind. After a late breakfast and a top up on the diesel for Clover I cast off at about 10.30 with a feeling of anticipation and some trepidation. This was the day I had been most looking forward to - a

visit to the Farne Islands which looked as though they had some delightful anchorages and great wildlife. However I was setting off on my own for the first time in Clover. Clover had not let me down so far and indeed had behaved beautifully and I had every confidence in her, however I had no one to turn to if things weren't going right and I was sailing into unfamiliar and potentially hazardous waters. Equally I was a free agent with no one to please but myself, no immediate deadlines to meet and, as I was hoping for anchorages over the next few days, some peace and solitude to enjoy without the worry of whether I would make the next marina in time for the tidal locking.

The wind was light and variable as I came out of the river past Coquet Island and it was a case of motor sailing. I had time on my side and decided to visit some of the bays and anchorages along this stretch of coast. The first was Almouth a river estuary that looked as though it would make the Findhorn estuary look like sailing up The Channel! I decided not to enter, but another day maybe when I was braver. Next came Boulmer, a lovely little pool with a narrow entrance sheltered by rocks that cover at high tide. Today it was an easy



entry but it was still too early to stay so I lazed on to Craster, headed towards the harbour and hooked north behind the skerries where there was another lovely anchorage, on a calm day like today, with Dunstanburgh Castle in the background. I was enjoying this exploration and the micro navigation. Whether or not I would have another chance to revisit these anchorages and explore them fuller was another question. On northwards to Newton (St Mary's) Haven which I had decided

would be an ideal lunch time anchorage - another small bay surrounded by skerries that would shelter the bay at low water in almost any wind direction. After a pleasant break with ever lighter winds I motored on past Beadnell Bay, another lovely looking anchorage, and on to the point being rounded by some kayaks. Some porpoises showed themselves for a while, and as I rounded the point Bamburgh Castle came into view. I motored on past Seahouses with its picturesque harbour, but this was not for me. By 17.30 I was approaching the Southeast corner of the Inner Farne and decided to motor round the island in a clockwise direction to the Kettle which from the pilot looked as though it would



be an ideal anchorage in a lovely pool surrounded by the inner islands and reefs. So it turned out as I dropped my anchor in 4 metres of water at 18.30. It was just a short row to the old light tower on the Inner Farne where the National Trust wardens stay while doing their conservation work.



Day 11 Farne Islands (the Kettle anchorage) circuit to Lindisfarne anchorage 13.7 nm 5 hr 15 min

The next morning I was up early to row to the Inner Farne to take a look around. I met up with one of the wardens who was very friendly and informative. Apparently the visitor boats are only allowed in the afternoon. I had the island to myself which was great for the



photography. The first challenge was to get from the harbour to the light tower, a mere hundred yards along a walkway but under constant aerial attack from the tern colony who were trying to protect their young on the ground which were difficult to avoid on the walkway. The parents apparently had difficulty identifying their own young it was so crowded and often landed close to a chick only to turn away with their Sand eel meal when they realised they had got the wrong one! Higher up, the ground was pocked with puffin nests. You had to stick to the walkways but even then it was difficult to avoid treading on some chick. The best cliffs were up at the new lighthouse. Here the ledges were occupied



by puffins, guillemots, razor bills and cormorants with a constant tooing and froing of parents with meals. It could not have been a better time to visit.



All too soon, as the tourist boats started to arrive, it was back to Clover for a late lunch. I then decided I would take a sail round the islands before coming back to the anchorage for the night. The tourist boats do much the same and it was interesting to see just how close to the rocks they would go. They obviously knew the waters well and were able to give their paying guests the ultimate Farne Islands experience. As I headed out past Longstone to pass inside the aptly

named Knivestone and Whirl Rocks the outermost points of the Outer Farne I was hit by a large swell. It was then I noticed that the tripper boat was poised just on the edge of the sheltered waters and was not coming any further. I too decided rather than brave the swell to the north I would retreat and retrace my route. By the time I had returned to the Kettle two other larger yachts had anchored in my spot and while sheltered were still exposed to a bit of swell coming between the islands over the reefs at mid water. I decided I would head for The Holy Island harbour which was a relatively short hop with still plenty of daylight and a following tide. It was a



pleasant motor sail in a light breeze and calm seas. The navigation in past Ridge End Buoy to Triton Buoy and then following the leading line of the Belfy and Beacon was interesting and exacting but not difficult under these conditions. I sailed past Lindisfarne Castle, which positively glowed in the low evening light, through flocks of seabirds skating across the water surface and with seals on the sands to the south, to my anchorage just below the old Benedictine Abbey. This was perfection and would rival any anchorage on the West Coast! I enjoyed my most peaceful night at anchor of the whole trip.



Day 12 Lindisfarne to Eyemouth 23.1 nm 5 hr 15 min

The next morning was another glorious day. I rowed ashore at 07.00 to enjoy the peace



before the causeway to Lindisfarne dried and opened the gates to the masses. A solitary man stood on a rock on the sands below the abbey and soaked in the sun's rays in peaceful meditation as the incoming tide gently scoured the sand around him. Eventually he had to wade back through knee deep water but he had enjoyed the moment and his thoughts and created a unique experience. The abbey itself was warm toned in this early morning light and as I wandered along the dunes I enjoyed taking photos of the varied

land/seascape peppered with butterflies. Past the bay where old upturned boats were used as sheds and children played in the warm waters then on to the castle. I walked on



past to the seaward coast. Here there were lines of stone sculptures. Someone had obviously started a craze. I sat in a throne made of stones and enjoyed the warmth of the sun as it rose high in the sky. Back towards the castle I visited the castle's walled garden created by Gertrude Jekyll and then enjoyed a tour round the castle. The music room was the best. What a place to play.

By early afternoon I was back at the boat and weighing anchor and heading for Eyemouth. I headed off along the coast in a pleasant SE wind of about 10-12 knots on a nice beam reach. An hour later the jib was furled and the



cruising chute hoisted as we sped along past Berwick upon Tweed, worthy of a visit but not today if I was to make the evening tide into Eyemouth before dark. The coastline was interesting but it was soon after 19.00 that I had the cruising chute and main stowed after a very pleasant sail, and

the engine on to enter the long narrow entrance, known locally as the canyon, at Eyemouth. At this stage of the tide it was straightforward but a carefully watch needs to be kept for any fishing boats coming or going from this busy little harbour.



Day 13 Eyemouth to Fidra west anchorage 32.1 nm 7 hr 0 min

I enjoyed a pleasant morning at Eyemouth stocking up. It was perhaps the most interesting harbour I visited because it still has a very active fishing fleet with all the associated industries. So as I walked the long harbour before crossing the bridge to enter the town there were fishermen preparing their boats, men welding in the boatyard and a general purposefulness. On the way back I chatted to a family who were fishing the river, the young boy and his sister proud to show me their catch. After an early lunch I turned Clover using warps in the confined space and headed out.



The Berwick coastline is very attractive to sail along, past St. Abb's Head, but there was one particular point I wanted to see. Unfortunately I would not have time to anchor and go ashore if I was to make the evening tide up the Forth to my next anchorage at Fidra but I would try to sail as close as I could. This was Hutton's Unconformity at Siccar Point off Cockburnspath in Berwickshire. It is a geological site described as the most important in the world as it revolutionised our thinking about the



Earth's age and how the landscape was formed by the cycle of deposition, folding, erosion and further deposition. That such processes occurred over an enormous time scale pointed to the fact that the Earth was much older than the Biblical Earth story that was believed in the 18th century. I got close enough to see it but the detail. I would have to return another day perhaps on foot.

I had been motor sailing but was able to turn the engine off as the wind picked up and was making good time as we passed the surreal buildings of Torness power station and headed on towards Dunbar which we passed at about 17.15. Soon the Bass Rock would come into view. We were now romping along. The gannet traffic was getting ever busier with birds flying in all directions. There it was, a massive rock, seemingly covered in snow



from the sea at its waist to its highest point. I

thought that this would be the birds' guano, but as I got closer I could see that it was due to the birds themselves that were packed so closely you could barely see the black rock between. The birds swirled in a mist around the rock nearly cutting out the sun. The wind was now quite strong and there were quite big seas around the rock, I sailed as close as I dared while trying to take pictures. This was awesome. The gannets on St Kilda had been amazing but this was something else with them confined to this one rock. With more than 150,000 Gannets this is the largest single rock gannetry in the world, and described by Sir David Attenborough as "one of the wildlife wonders of the

world". Over the summer I would have seen the largest gannetry in the world at St Kilda as well as the largest mainland gannetry at Troup Head on the last day of this adventure. I felt privileged. I circumnavigated the rock in an anticlockwise direction. I was surprised by how much building was on the south face, the remains of a castle



below the light and the remains of St Baldred's Chapel above and the tremendous foghorn perched high up on the NE face. The rock was used as a prison as well as for grazing sheep! As I approached the south end of the rock again I headed off west towards Fidra, a small island midway along the south side of the Firth of Forth which had a suitable anchorage on either side depending upon the wind direction. I intended to anchor in the west bay. The

sun was setting on Tantallon Castle as I left the Bass Rock behind and sped past Craigleith, an island where I was joined by a large pod of dolphins. It was getting late but I have to to



enjoy them, they stayed with me for over an hour passing right under the bow and clearing the water to either side. It was difficult to get photos in the fading light. Eventually I had to drag myself away and set sail once again still at a good pace past Lamb Island towards the winking lighthouse of Fidra. At last in the gloaming I was setting the anchor in another charming anchorage. I doubt that a day's sailing could get much better than this.



Day 14 Fidra to Isle of May via The Bass Rock 13.1 nm 5 hr 0 min

I was not in a rush to get away in the morning having arrived quite late the night before. Unfortunately you are not allowed to land on Fidra without permission as it is a nesting site. I respected this but it looked an interesting island with plenty of birds and good geology possessing a long natural arch. It was a much calmer day and looked like a motoring day. I decided I would go back to the Bass Rock only a mile or so detour, to see if I could get closer and some better shots, although it was a bit overcast. This time I went

inside the islands to inspect some other possible anchorages. Once at the Bass Rock I was able to motor within a few metres of the rock and got really close to the birds, although nothing like as close as I can when going to Troup Head from the land.



As with all cliff nesting bird colonies not only do you get the visual and sound experience but the smell is unforgettable! As I headed off towards the Isle of May I did wonder if I should have visited some of the coastal sites adjacent to the Rock. There is one spectacular natural harbour, the Gegan, which I could not have got Clover into but it would have been fun to take the dinghy. However I wanted to get to the Isle of a May in good time so I could spend a good time ashore that afternoon as the forecast was not looking so good with patchy fog around the coast for the next few days. I motored the length of Isle of May on the west heading for the anchorage in West Tarbert. The cliff scenery was spectacular.



I had never visited the island before despite living in Anstruther where I had not taken advantage of either the University boat or the Tripper boats based there. Once at anchor I rowed the dinghy ashore and tied up to the metal ladder leaving plenty of rope on the falling tide. Again there were masses of birds, kittiwakes, puffins, terns and razor bills.

I spent a pleasant afternoon wandering freely over the island visiting the old lighthouse, a spectacular Victorian building with a walled garden and associated dwelling houses, and the new lighthouse now used for accommodation for scientific research - although photography expeditions seemed to count when I spoke to some of the residents. I also spent some time with one of the wardens finding out what life was like on the island before heading back to the dinghy. The tide was out, the dinghy was floating but the ladder ended 4 feet above the water! By the time I was back at Clover the mist was enclosing the island



Day 15 Isle of May to Arbroath via The Bell Rock 25.8 nm 6 hr 5 min

08.30 weighed anchor. Still misty but calm. I hoped the sun would burn off the mist. Caireen was coming down to Arbroath to meet me so I proceeded cautiously on a bearing for the Bell Rock not expecting to meet much serious traffic on this bit of water. Progress was good but I always find these conditions very tiring. By 11.00 I was straining to see the Bell Rock through the mist. I was using the contours to determine my position as I approached the Bell Rock and verifying it with the gps. The water was mirror calm and with the mist very eerie. Then out of the gloom the lighthouse appeared. I circumnavigated it to see it as best I could in different lights. Having satisfied my curiosity I sailed on a bearing due west of the light for half a mile. I then contacted the coastguard again with my precise position and asked if there was any shipping in the area. Apparently not so I told him I was heading to Arbroath he wished me luck and warned me it was fogbound at present. Two and half hours later the mist burnt off and Arbroath looked lovely.



Caireen came to join me on Clover while we were in Arbroath. It was nice to spend some time together and we visited the sights of Arbroath, the cathedral and a walk along the beach/promenade, as well as tracking down some oil for Clover's engine. The weather was great so we decided to go and visit the East Neuk of Fife for a couple of days. The first day we stopped in to look at the Discovery in Dundee. This is an amazing exhibit. We



went on down to St. Andrews to look around the town and University which was one of my watering holes in my life of academia as a post doc researcher. The visit brought back some happy memories and it was a nice place to spend a little



time. The following day was spent exploring all the Neuk's harbours from Elie to Crail. Each has its own charm although they seemed much busier than I remembered them. We both agreed that Elie would make a great spot for a family holiday in the future! We also liked the quiet charm of Cellardyke where I used to stay and had to cycle the 10 miles to St Andrews daily. I was glad that I had not stayed at Anstruther with Clover which seemed far too busy with boats in the marinarised harbour, funfairs and trippers enjoying the Mediterranean weather. A stark contrast to the solitude, peace and different kind of wildlife I had enjoyed at my anchorages.

Day 16 Arbroath to Catterline anchorage 25.3 nm 5hr 15 min

Donnie was going to join me at Peterhead but it would be a long leg to do by myself in a oner. I did not fancy stopping at Stonehaven as the harbour dries and I had heard reports of people having uncomfortable night alongside. The alternative was one of several anchorages if the weather was ok. Of these Catterline looked an attractive bay that should be sheltered unless there was any east in the wind. Having waved goodbye to Caireen I set off after lunch on a pleasant afternoon but with fickle winds. The coast was interesting



but I had to motor sail with a variety of sail combinations but slowly ticked off the bays and headlands. Eventually I reached Catterline and after circling the bay several times to find the most suitable spot dropped the anchor. It was quite a tight anchorage and the wind was a bit variable in direction but I was satisfied and settled down for a good night's sleep.



Day 17 Catterline anchorage to Peterhead 40.1 nm 10 hr 57 min

Another long day ahead so I weighed anchor at 08.00. With 8 knots of wind from the SW I was able to sail on a flat sea and was making good time with some good cliff scenery.

Dunnottar Castle looked imposing on it's rocky promontory. Then Stonehaven was



followed by some interesting future anchorages at Newtonhill, Portlethen and Cove. A few large ships were anchored off Aberdeen but it was otherwise quiet. The broad sands and seals off the Ythan Estuary. All the time I was busy with the sails, the engine off and on as the wind came and went, the cruising chute up as the wind would



allow. Past Slains Castle, thought to be the inspiration for Dracula and then onto the Bullers of Buchan, a collapsed cave with a circular pot joined to the open sea by a natural arch. There were many places to visit and explore if there was the time. This coast certainly does not lack its interest but on passage it must be rare to



find the conditions to take advantage. Finally the lighthouse at Buchan Ness appeared, round the corner the tiny port of Boddam and then on to Peterhead where I would meet up with Donnie from the club for the final legs.



Day 18 Peterhead to Whitehills 40.3 nm 11 hr 3 min

We set off early with a good breeze but in quite the wrong direction to get round Rattray head under sail. We persevered under sail for a bit tacking out to sea but this was going to be a long day at best so we eventually succumbed to motor sailing. Rattray Head was a bit lumpy but not too unpleasant. Once round the wind was a bit freer but got lighter so we still motor sailed past Fraserburgh when the coast began to be more interesting again. We



passed some of our favourite summer haunts, the village of Pennan, on to Troup Head where the gannets seemed like



mere confetti sprinkled over the cliff and then to the villages of Crovie and Gardenstown. At last Macduff and Banff appeared and then it was only a short distance before we turned the corner at Knock Head and into Whitehills. As we approached the harbour a dolphin made a fleeting appearance. Caireen and I had often sat at the harbour musing on its narrow twisting entrance. Now was the moment, but all went well and we were greeted by the harbour master who kindly took photographs of our approach. That evening we enjoyed the local fish, caught by their own boat, and chips.



Day 19 Whitehills to Fortrose 53.5 nm 12 hr 4 min

It was not my intention to do this leg in one. After all there were plenty of spots to stop now that we were into home waters. Maybe Lossiemouth, Burghead or Findhorn, and if the weather was good perhaps Caireen would be able to join me for the final sail to Fortrose. However Donnie needed to back as he was using his boat Saria for the Dinghy Regatta committee boat the next day. Also after a month away when you smell home the attraction is irresistible. So it was we set off early from Whitehills to leave our options open. Almost immediately the dolphin from the night before appeared along with his mates - about 20 of them.





They stayed with us for the next two hours. It was hard to focus on the sailing with this distraction. At times I counted six of them together riding the wave in front of the bow. Sometimes they spun under the boat exposing their paler bellies or cleared the water in dramatic leaps. If you spotted some off the bow others astern would distract you. I have seen the Moray Firth dolphins many times, from the shore, from our Corribee, from the

Wayfarer or kayak but this was certainly one of the most spectacular sightings I have witnessed. They are such playful creatures.



Again it was a day of ticking off the landmarks, Portsoy, Sandend, Logie Head and Findlater Castle, Cullen, the Bow Rock, Portnockie, Findochty. Then between Buckie and Lossiemouth there seemed less of interest before returning to the cliff scenery from Covesea, past Hopeman and then to Burghead before crossing the bay to Findhorn. The wind had been getting lighter all the time and we were motor sailing to maintain a reasonable speed. Off Findhorn there was a shower and I donned my waterproofs for the first time at sea since leaving Farnbridge on the River

Crouch! They were soon off and it was a glorious evening as we sailed up the Firth to Chanonry Point and round the corner to our mooring.





630 nautical miles, 165 hours at an average speed of 3.8 knots over 19 days of sailing and 26 days away those are the statistics. We could have done it faster I'm sure. I would have loved to have done it slower and spent more time at more places but is that ever possible.

I spent more time motoring or motor sailing than I would have liked (the best part of 100 hours). I guess that is inevitable on the east coast but there were some great sailing days as well. Would I do it again? You bet. It was great especially the Northumberland, Berwickshire and Firth of Forth coasts - so much to see and explore. The most scary day was one of the two foggy days going across the Wash and from the Isle of a May to Arbroath. The best day from Eyemouth to Fidar. There was no worst day! Would I recommend the trip? Definitely if you get the chance.



The adventure begins!

