

# SLOW BOAT HOME

## Richard White's Marcon Trophy winning log of *Little Talisker's* 740-mile trip from the Humber to Plymouth last year

After 13 years spent on the Humber it was time to move *Little Talisker* south to her new home on the Tamar. At 1130 on 10 July and an hour before high water I dropped her lines and we headed out from the Humber Yawl Club haven at Brough, 30 miles upriver from the sea.

A back eddy along the north bank carried us east before picking up the ebb. With a S F3/4 we stayed on the same tack down river from Hull and reached the Lower Burcom buoy off Grimsby at 1550. The traditional anchorage at the mouth of the river is in the bight at Spurn Head but this is open to the south. There are spots to drop the hook east of Grimsby on the south bank but with a F6 forecast overnight this would likely be uncomfortable.

There is a free flow through the Grimsby lock at HW +/-2hrs after which you have to pay. I coughed up and enjoyed a peaceful night on the very hospitable Humber Cruising Association's pontoon.

The downside of spending the night in Grimsby is that if you forgo the option of paying for an early lock out you miss most of the south going flood. I took the first free flow at 1050, two hours before high water. The first six months of 2023 had been characterised by settled periods of northerlies and easterlies. By July the wind had reverted to its usual southerly to westerly quadrant and the morning's Inshore Waters Forecast of SW 4 or 5 occ. 6 gave an indication of how the trip was going to go. Things looked set for a long day; a night at anchor somewhere off the Norfolk north coast beckoned. A night time

entry into Wells really wants crew in the bows with a spotlight to pick out the nav marks and as I was sailing solo the trip to Lowestoft seemed excessively arduous. I cleared the Donna Nook firing range at 1415 with 2 reefs in the main and the no.2 headsail. From there to the Inner Dowsing ECM a series of heavy thundery showers came in from the south west with the wind picking up to perhaps F6 and dying down to very light airs once it had gone through. I kept the no.2 flying and reefed and unreefed the main as the wind strength played around. Eventually things settled down with a sunny evening under full sail. By 0140 I was anchored off Blakeney, sheltered from the wind but rolling around in the tidal stream. Nearly 15 hours from Grimsby, the day had lived up to its promise.

12 July. I weighed anchor at 0515 with the north bound tide starting about 0730 and a forecast W or SW 4 or 5, maybe 6 later. I had forgotten quite how many crab pots there are of Sheringham and Cromer and I was glad I had not tried to anchor off that stretch of the Norfolk coast the previous night. In the event I had a southerly as far as Cromer, the wind then veering as I turned southwards keeping me on a reach and allowing the boat to maintain speed against



the tide. The wind had read the forecast as far as its strength was concerned and I passed Waxham under just the double reefed main. By 1615 I was alongside at the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk in Lowestoft. In all Grimsby to Lowestoft took just under 26 hours under way for a distance of 105 miles.

13/14 July. The forecast was for the usual S or SW 3 to 5. I ignored the tidal stream atlas which had the south going tide running from 0300 and had a lie in. Leaving Lowestoft at 1110 gave four hours of slow progress pushing the ebb. The wind died as we were passing the entrance to the Ore at 2055. Approaching the Felixstowe deep water channel in the dark I was a bit bemused as to why a large part of the dock appeared to be moving. A quick scuttle down to the chart table to consult the AIS told me it was the Hook of Holland ferry and that it would be wise to wait for it to pass ahead of me before crossing the DWC. The arrival at Harwich at Half Penny Pier in the early hours was entertaining. Fenders and lines rigged on starboard to come alongside the inside of the pontoon head to

tide. Not sure about the etiquette of rafting up at two in the morning and only one tight space on the pontoon so decided to try the outside. Fenders and lines moved to port and approached the pontoon. It's about six inches higher than my topsides. On the inside of the pontoon there are horizontal fenders at water level to keep boats with a low freeboard clear of the edge but not on the outside. Move fenders and lines to starboard and go for the small gap on the inside. Ferry gliding in against the tide, it's a piece of cake. 0215 and all fast. 54 miles, 15 hours.

In the morning I found the stanchions were catching on the pontoon when *Little Talisker* rolled in the wash of passing vessels. As strong winds were forecast I crossed the Stour to Shotley where I spent the weekend in bright



***Little Talisker* alongside at Itchenor in Chichester Harbour**

sunshine enjoying the shelter from the southerly F7/8.

17 July. The wind moderated on Monday but was still from the south. I wanted to take the chance to explore some of the east coast rivers before I disappeared to the south west and locked out of Shotley at 0430, dodged the inbound Hook of Holland Ferry and turned north for the Ore. By 0630 for the first and last occasion on the trip I had the headsail polled out and the preventer rigged on the main. By 0700, 1 ½ hours after low water, I was at the Orford safe water mark. Reeds suggests there should be sufficient depth to cross the bar from LW +2 ½. At about 0715 a yacht exited the river. I called it up on the VHF and they told me their draught was 1.5 metres and said there was plenty of



water. Suspecting local knowledge was at play, I loitered around the SWM for another half hour before committing to the entrance, religiously keeping the buoys on the bearings shown on the current chart.

The bar was bumpy with breaking waves to the south and exposed sandbanks to the north of the channel. The least depth I found was 2.1 metres which was quite shallow enough to maintain concentration. Once inside I ran up the river under headsail and by 0930 was alongside Orford Quay. Happily, the café was open for a bacon butty and a brew. Carrying on up the river past swarms of dinghies at Aldeburgh I picked up a buoy at Blackthorn Reach. The wind had increased and shifted to the west, making this part of the river exposed and uncomfortable. Heading back down river I anchored in Short Gull on the north side of Havergate Island for a night of perfect peace.

18 July. High water at Orford Bar was at 1243. My calculations gave me 3 metres on the bar at 1500 and I started the exit half an hour before this. In the event I found a minimum depth of 2.9 metres. The wind had sufficient south in it for me to lay the entrance to Felixstowe on one tack and I crossed the deep water channel just after 1700. A gentle breeze took me up the Orwell to Pin Mill, *Little Talisker's* original home. Sailing through the moorings at Pin Mill I came across the Trident *Mandura* with its owner Peter Ives aboard. There was just enough wind for me to lazily circle the boat while we had a chat before I dropped down the river a bit and anchored inshore of the moorings at Colton Creek.

19 July. Another fine day's sailing, naturally close hauled once out of the Orwell. Getting under way at 0550 I had the last of the ebb going down river and then had the tide with me to Brightlingsea arriving at 1230. Calling up Brightlingsea Harbour I was asked to berth in the modern "marina", overlooked at close quarters by blocks of flats. I followed instructions and



then discovered that the marina has a sill which would prevent an early departure. A quick chat with the harbour launch and I moved across to the mid harbour pontoon, a much more pleasant place.

20 July. Thames crossing day and so a bit of a milestone. The intended route was through the Wallet Spitway and then through the channel between Middle and South West Sunk. Both reward careful attention to the chart but the planning was made easy by the appropriately named and very helpful website Crossing the Thames Estuary which has up to date surveys and navigational notes for the two passages. Paranoia about finding myself on the Middle Sunk with a falling tide led to an early departure from Brightlingsea at 0550, LW -2 ½, a sunny morning with no wind at all.

The Wallet is buoyed and I had 3.5 metres of water but I relied on the Garmin to guide me

through the Middle Sunk where the least depth was 5.7m.

Once clear of Princes Channel on the south side of the Thames approaches I turned off the engine and under sail found I could make two and a half knots through the water or one and a half over the ground. Feeling honour had been satisfied, I gave up on the sailing after 15 minutes and arrived at Ramsgate under motor at 1710. For the last four hours I had been tracked by a yacht which eventually overhauled me. I met its owner in the harbour. He was sailing an immaculate Twister solo round Britain. Going clockwise, the first part of the voyage had been met by consistent northerlies. When he reached Inverness the weather had changed and he had had consistent southerlies and southwesterlies since then.

21 July. The 0600 Inshore Waters forecast was W or NW 3 or 4 backing SW 4 to 6 for a time. HW was 0331 and I left Ramsgate for Eastbourne at 0615 with a couple of hours of tide to push before picking up the westerly flow at Dover. By 0835 I was on a reach off Dover with 5.8 knots on the log and 8 over the ground showing on the GPS. The reach continued to Dungeness where the wind backed to SW and I tacked on to port (the Lydd range was not in use) and put a reef in. An hour later I was under 2 reefs and the no.2 headsail with the wind a solid force 5, perhaps 6. The wave height increased dramatically with extensive white horses and I found I was having to steer around the waves to make headway. By 1345 I had made four and a half miles of westing since passing Dungeness four hours earlier. Turning round I was a mile off Dover by 1700 and all fast by 1800. Just under 12 hours and 66 miles sailed to get from Ramsgate to Dover. On the run back in the swell the tiller pilot was unable to hold a course so I heaved to to

consult the Almanac on the entry procedure for Dover. As well as calling for permission to enter the harbour at two miles and 200 metres from the entrance and calling the marina for a berth once

inside the harbour entrance, you also need to ask VTS for permission to enter the new marina itself. With one VTS channel for leisure and commercial traffic it must be a challenge getting the necessary calls through on a busy Saturday morning. The new marina is impressive, not least its eastern breakwater, which is now a solid concrete structure, the mk. 1 completely ineffective version having been ripped out almost as soon as it was built.

22/23 July. Two days spent in Dover waiting for high winds to blow through.

24 July. Monday's 0600 forecast was for SW becoming cyclonic 4 or 5 becoming N or NE later. I left for a second attempt at Eastbourne at 0745 with the start of the west going tide. After a lumpy sea outside the harbour entrance the sea state settled down with just a gentle swell left over from the weekend's weather and I could comfortably carry full main and the no.1 headsail. All was going to plan, close hauled under a clear sunny sky when the boat rounded



**Dover's new marina**

up and was knocked down with seawater pouring over the cockpit coming. The boat stood up as soon as I let the sheets go by which time the wind was back to its previous benign force 4. I was a bit perturbed as I had not picked up any warnings of the gust. On the plus side I was impressed by the speed at which the three inches



of water in the cockpit drained and how efficiently the lower washboard had kept the inside of the boat dry. The plates had travelled from their galley storage to the chart table and the cushions were all on the port bunk but otherwise all was well below deck. There had been no sign of any approaching squalls and I put the broach down to a one-off event and carried on with the same sail plan, putting in a reef an hour later as the wind slowly built up. It was lumpy at Dungeness at 1255 but much more manageable than on Friday. An hour later a heavy band of rain approached and I prepared for a rise in wind speed. It picked up a bit but at the same time the forecast veer to the north materialised and I found myself on a beam reach. At 1645 I was still on a reach. Thoughts of Eastbourne forgotten, Brighton became the destination. Approaching Beachy Head the wind accelerated and then died as I came into its lee. I put the engine on as I passed the Seven Sisters at 1920 and was alongside in Brighton marina by 2210, fourteen and a half hours and 75 miles over the ground. Having found the harbour entrance against the bright lights of Brighton, entering was not without interest. The starboard hand marks had been removed from the entry channel to facilitate dredging while inside the first two or three rows of pontoons had also been removed, leaving their unlit piles looming out of the darkness as I groped around for my berth.

25 July. The plan was to get to Chichester, 32 miles from Brighton. The 0600 forecast was for N backing W or NW 3 or 4. In the event a late departure from Brighton at 0840, which gave just two hours of fair tide combined with a light westerly put paid to that. Instead I had a slow beat to Littlehampton, getting to Town Quay at high water at 1630. A delightful harbour but with harbour dues included, the Harbour Master took £34.57 off me for the night, the second most expensive berth of the trip.

26 July. An 0530 departure at high water gave me five hours of fair tide. Plan A was to anchor at Whitecliff Bay on the eastern side of the Isle of Wight before heading down the Solent the next day. The 0600 forecast (Variable 2 to 4, SW 3 to 5 increasing 6 or 7 later, outlook SW 5 to 7) persuaded me of the merits of a short day and going to Chichester Harbour. I motored in a light westerly as far as the Looe Channel. Through the channel at 0835 I had time to kill and went for a pootle around the eastern

approaches to the Solent in building winds. I passed West Pole at the start of the run in to Chichester harbour under headsail at LW +0140, finding a minimum depth in the channel of a comfortable 4.6 metres. After a run up the harbour I was alongside the (mid river) visitor's pontoon at Itchenor at 1435. The nice lady in the harbour office took my money for two nights mooring fees and persuaded me that I should pay a week's harbour dues as it was much cheaper than seven single days. She had clearly had a look at the weather forecast.

27 – 31 July. Other than the 28th, the forecast was consistently for W or SW, 5/6, occasionally 7. I skipped the opportunity to make a break for it on the 28th, as it would have meant two or



**Chichester Harbour's West Pole Beacon**

three nights holed up in one of the Solent marinas instead of the very pleasant Chichester harbour. The daily routine was to get the water taxi ashore, go for a long walk, possibly have a pint and then amble back to Itchenor, ensuring at some point I picked a bunch of samphire to garnish the evening's Korean hot and spicy noodles.

1 - 2 August. Cabin fever combined with forecast F4 southerlies (albeit SW 6 or 7 later) tempted me to point my nose out of the harbour. I crossed the bar under 2 reefs and the no.2 at 1130, twenty minutes before high water. Outside a westerly 4 or 5 was blowing. Without the promised southerly, I turned round and headed back to Itchenor, sailing up river through racing fleets of Toppers, Mirrors and Lasers. The Toppers and Mirrors crewed by 11-year-olds, all laughing hysterically while trying to get their mates to capsize and the Lasers crewed by 14-year-olds, all trying to see how close they could pass in front of any lumbering cruisers. When I checked at 1530, the website Bramblemet.co.uk was showing F6 W at Bramble Bank. By midday



on the 2nd the wind was dropping and the 1800 forecast was looking good.

3 August. The morning's forecast was N or NW 3 to 5 and it was time to go. Leaving Itchenor at 1015, I started the exit over the bar at 1130, two hours before high water. Breaking waves at the North Winner buoy and surf to the west of the exit ensured my attention and I kept the engine running in case of any unanticipated tidal sets. Once past West Pole I could lay Horse Sand Fort, a tack avoided an in-bound ferry and by 1510 I was at South Bramble, on a fine reach with a NW F3. I rang Lymington Harbour who confirmed they would have a space for me. Carrying on past Cowes, I only had one racing fleet to sail through (it was Cowes week). By



**Lymington Town Quay**

1745 I was alongside at the Town Quay pontoon in Lymington. As a country bumpkin from the Humber I was impressed to see quite how many boats were packed in to the harbour. To avoid disappointment, it is definitely worth calling to ask about a berth before visiting.

4 August. The 0600 forecast was for W or NW backing SW later 3 to 5. HW Lymington was at 1329 and the west going tidal stream would be going from 1321. I left Lymington at midday and was cheered up at the exit when a teenager in a RIB drew alongside me, said "Trident 24. Good boat" and then motored off. I was at Hurst Castle at 1335 at the south western end of the Solent, tacked at the North East Shingles east cardinal and beat down the North Channel before heading out close hauled on a track of 235° in a pleasant F4. With high winds forecast for the 5th, I

passed on a night at anchor, in either Swanage or Studland Bays and by 1725 was at the start of the Poole Harbour entrance, pushing the ebb and with the wind on my nose.

After making 400 yards in half an hour it was engine on. Even then progress was painfully slow and I was a bit miffed when a couple of Bembridge Redwings, a keelboat with a super high aspect main sail, effortlessly creamed past me, presumably on their way back from Cowes.

Once inside the harbour and safely past the chain ferry I could turn off the engine and sail for a bit. I skipped the option of spending the night at anchor in the sheltered waters around the back of Brownsea Island and headed for Poole Quay Boat Haven. Getting past the Solent felt a significant milestone. The long leg past Portland Bill remained but I could now definitely feel home calling.

5th August. The forecast W 5 to 7 veering NW 6 to 8 was correct and I spent the day in Poole. Pipa Hare's foiling IMOCA 60, *Medallia*, was on the pontoon next to me. Pipa turned up on her push bike and it was a privilege to have a chat with her. After a lot of work on the boat, including fitting larger foils to keep up with more modern boats, she'd just had a terrible Fastnet sailing two handed but if things go to plan she will be in next year's Vendee Globe, sailing single handed non-stop round the world.

6th August. After taking on (very reasonably priced) diesel at the fuel pontoon opposite Poole Quay I left at 1155. With a NW 3 or 4 it was a lovely run down the harbour under headsail, passing the chain ferry at 1245 where I set the main. Passing one and a half miles off St Albans head at 1500, half an hour before the start of the west going tidal stream the sea state built up a bit but not so as to slow the boat. The Lulworth firing range was not in use so I was free to tack



close inshore and check out Worbarrow Bay and Lulworth Cove, with the wind now a W F4. With an early morning departure for the passage past Portland Bill a night at anchor beckoned. I chose Weymouth Bay rather than the northern end of Portland Harbour as it meant I wouldn't be exiting a strange harbour in the early hours of the morning. I anchored at 2145 to the north east of Weymouth Harbour in complete shelter.

7th August. The book told me the window for a westward passage past Portland Bill was HW Portland +4 to HW -6 which translated as from 0323 to 0543. The midnight Inshore Forecast promised NW backing W 3 or 4 occ. 5 later and I left Weymouth at 0215. I had a W F3/4 as I sailed south. Portland light was abeam at 0330, 1 ½ miles to the west, *Little Talisker* was under full sail under a clear night sky and we were doing 7 knots over the ground. The sea state picked up to what I would describe as a big swell but there were no breaking waves and by the time we were three miles to the south of Portland Bill the sea state was unaffected by the race. The rest of the day was a mixture of sailing and motoring with a headwind all the way. Half way across Lyme Bay a pod of dolphins arrived to welcome me to the West Country. The sea state built steadily on the approach to Dartmouth, the last thirteen miles to the entrance to the Dart taking four hours. I entered the harbour at 1530 and was on the Harbour Authority's walk ashore pontoon by 1620. 62.9 miles over the ground.

8th August. A drizzly morning with very little wind so a late start. I spent the afternoon exploring the Dart, picking up a mooring off Galmpton Mill for a lunch stop. Almost next to me were the Tridents *Moonbeam* and *Sabrina*. The late afternoon weather built up and I left the river at 1630 finding the exit very lumpy. A beat



**Richard White was presented with the Marcon Trophy at the South West Fitting Out Lunch in March**

south past Slapton took me to Hallsands where I anchored at 1900, in perfect shelter in the lee of Start Point.

9th August. Within half an hour of leaving Hallsands at 0510 the wind had died and visibility was down to 200 yards. Not wanting to meet any fishing boats unexpectedly or indeed any of the rocks off Start Point I kept a cautious mile offshore. The occasional boat appeared out of the mist as I motored west and eventually the Mewstone loomed up out of the murk. In improving visibility the

Shagstone, the East Tinker cardinal mark and the eastern end of Plymouth Breakwater slipped by. Passing through the Bridge on the west side of Drake's Island, I was met outside Torpoint Yacht Harbour by the Harbour Launch and at 1100 shown to my mooring buoy, *Little Talisker's* new home.

Overall, *Little Talisker* was at sea on 20 days, covering 742 miles over the ground. 12 days were spent in harbour waiting for weather to pass. The 1GM used 38.5 litres of diesel, suggesting around 40 hours under engine. Navigation was primarily on paper charts with a Garmin GPS but I did have an AIS receiver and a small Android notepad running Marine Navigator for those moments when self-doubt began to weigh heavily.

### **Richard White**

There were two entries for this year's Marcon Trophy competition which was judged by David Hill, a former Hon Sec of the TOA who once owned *Piper*. He highly commended both entries: "Both logs were of a high standard and it is quite a skill to narrate a tale of a passage made in a small boat not to a general audience, but to an audience of small boat sailors. There has to be a careful mix of navigational information coupled with weather, especially wind, and all held together with a human interest theme. Both logs were very successful in achieving this." The second log will be published in the next newsletter.