

South Wales

Dale Cruise, early May 2023, Carmel Royston

The first rally of the South Wales 2023 season and the winds of change were in the air. The original plan was to head to Dale, spend the night aboard or on the beach, and head back to Llanion Cove the following morning in following seas, but the wind that was forecast to be over 30 knots stymied that plan. I think Charlie's keen suggestion to camp



aboard
put
a few
sailors
off, so by
the time
Friday arrived
it was clear
Baggywrinkle
would be in the
company of none on
this adventure! Charlie
was persuaded instead to
spend a comfortable night
in the local Beggar's Reach,
which is a splendid hotel with
sweeping views of perfectly
groomed lawns on all sides,
though not quite a glimpse of the
Cleddau in the valley below.

(Left): Charlie preparing *Baggywrinkle* and practising reefing the mainsail

After a more than hearty Welsh breakfast which was included, (well you can't turn down a free meal can you?!) Carmel and Charlie hitched up to find a suitably sheltered slip with which to explore the upper reaches of the Eastern Cleddau – new territory for these two.

Alas the so called 'all-tide' slip at Landshipping was a shallow, shingled affair with barely enough depth to manhandle the boat into the bracing water, resulting in Charlie, who was ill-prepared for such a strenuous struggle after such a hearty breakfast, ended up stripping off his trousers in pursuit of deeper water to loosen the boat from its trailer. Unfortunately this decision was made around the same time that his mobile fell out of a trouser pocket and into the drink.

Nevertheless, we had success in launching the boat



Dipping into estuaries en route where the high water allowed

at last and Carmel, who up to this point had managed to only wade to her knees, was left floundering about with the bung that had been left out! A rookie error that fortunately was soon rectified before Charlie bravely waded back to park the car.

Once all was in order the pair set sail against a fair tide, and like typical DCA-ers were soon dipping into minor estuaries, exploring along the way. Both Charlie and Carmel lamented their lack of bird knowledge as a pair of white wading birds, almost egret-like, were disturbed slightly by the sudden appearance of a small boat.

Baggywrinkle makes a striking contrast with her slash of red sails, but we soon discovered up here that any boat must be quite rare as not a single soul was seen on the entire journey to Slebech, where finally with both sail and oars at work in a futile attempt to make way against the tide, *Baggywrinkle* took a brief respite catching the centreboard in the soft mud which had gradually expanded either side of the estuary. A

Enjoying being the only ones on this stretch of the river



(Below) Paddle-Sailing from Landshipping to Slebech against the tide

few snacks to fortify the oarsman and *Baggywrinkle* was once more paddle-sailing, this time making excellent time, being carried along by the tide. There was just enough time to marvel at what both agreed might be buzzards hovering effortlessly in thermals above the wood lining the bank to the now starboard side before the breeze picked up and the wind against tide made for a lumpy chop – something familiar from the previous year's rally. Fortunately, after only a light lunch, neither sailor felt queasy and were soon discussing plan B if the ramp we'd left that morning was impossible to access now the tide was well and truly a good way out.

A quick inspection of the chart revealed very few choices. With Black Pill being rather a long way around by car, it was decided that the best bet was for Carmel to sail along down to Lawrenny to be met by Charles and the trailer. Though dearer, this was more reliably accessible in low tide conditions and only a few miles away by road. Before setting off once more, there was barely a discussion before the first reef was added. A second discussion about managing the entrance to Lawrenny against tide should the wind fail proved a little more challenging, before the anchor was made more readily available and a plan C to collect Charlie off the shingle beach at Lawrenny if necessary, when Carmel reached the river mouth.

With a cheery wave goodbye Charlie left to fetch the trailer and car to enact his part of the plan (this time with all his garments safely on!)

I have a newfound respect for any DCA sailors who regularly sail single-handed. Needless to say, as soon as Charlie waved goodbye I was suddenly very aware of no longer having a second pair of hands, and became very grateful for the reef in *Baggywrinkle's* sail! She can be quite a handful in the gusts, as I soon found out when the West and East estuaries meet to become a river which widens. I was suddenly more exposed. That raised my next single-handed challenge. I thought it wise to put on waterproofs before I became too cold, as the wind against tide was creating a little swell that occasionally began to break over the deck, adding to the water swilling beneath the floorboards.

Alas, the waterproofs had been stowed under the foredeck this time, not in the back locker. Could I reach them? Fortunately, and I think I may have Roger Barnes to thank, who's perhaps had a similar dilemma once in this very boat – and helpfully, there's a little tiller extension attached



to the top of the tiller by a piece of rope, allowing it to extend and swivel. So once retrieved I now had my sallies grasped between my knees, which fortunately were packed at the top, but now had to pull them up between tacks and tippy gusts without falling over or dropping anything. Honestly I don't know how you intrepid lot do it, but I was having to employ a lot of positive self-talk to persuade myself not to panic when my wet shoe got caught up inside the inner liner of my trouser leg!

'How would I swim if my sallies were only halfway up my thighs and the boat capsized?' It was a thought I quickly dismissed and concentrated on relocating my shoe and pulling up the trousers to my waist. I didn't fancy removing my buoyancy aid to pull the dungaree bit of them over my shoulders. That would do, I decided, and refocused on getting to Lawrenny.

I can't say I felt this way the rest of the journey, as in fact once I found the point where our Tideway starts to 'dig in' she actually handled the winds better than I had given her credit for and we were soon making excellent time and I was enjoying the totally unique view afforded by being on a river, and started to appreciate the texture and amazing coloured layering in the craggy rocks lining one bank, and the civilisation that appeared in a bay with fishing boats and sailing yachts cheerfully swinging on their moorings.

I saw two boats out on my journey south, both powered day boats with tell-tale fishing paraphernalia in the open cabins. I also remembered fondly as I passed it, the Tideway meeting point that had coincided with our DCA exploration up this way the previous year. Not long before Lawrenny, I thought, and by now I was starting to feel much more confident at the helm of my dinghy.

They say pride comes before a fall, so in a moment of lapsed attention I promptly failed a tack, backing the jib, and drifting away from the river entrance (don't tell Charlie I was too busy spying him on the beach, he'll get a big head!)

It was nice to reach my final destination after the initial stress of being alone, and I glided to a gentle halt in the mud at the foot of the slipway feeling particularly at one with my boat. There I was greeted by a familiar face from our local yacht club, Derek, who had arrived just an hour or so before by car and bumped into Charlie. Needless to say, as all good DCA events should end, once we recovered *Baggywrinkle* from the water, we all retired to the pub to swap tall tales and drink ale! CR

