

First Cruise of the Year

Roger Bamford

A good weather forecast for the next few days saw me on my way to Milford Haven on April 28, 2013 for my first outing of the year. After launching I visited a friend in Edwards Pill, having been invited to supper and offered a comfy bed to ease me into the trip. It had been a long day and I was out like a light.

Next day was clear and bright and I was underway by 09:10. I made straight for 'Sprinkle Pill' barely a mile upstream. I had been planning to look in and as the tide was rising it was the ideal time. It had been described to me as a truly beautiful place and so it proved to be. Access is limited to the higher tides for dinghies and yachts but canoeists can almost always enter. I hope to return for an overnight stay sometime. The breeze had increased and was quite boisterous so I made the most of it and sailed upsteam past Landshipping.

By this time the wind had increased and I had the first reef in and no jib. It was fluky near the higher ground so that I was beating one minute and running the next. As I rounded the last bend before the Cleddau bridge I was confronted with some truly rough water as the ebb battled with the wind. I blew the lunch whistle and turned into Cosheston Pill near the Pembrokeshire Activity Centre. What a difference. The high ground shielded me from the wind and warm sunshine made for a pleasant break.

Underway again I made rapid progress towards Angle where I was to spend the night. It was dead low water when I arrived so I snoozed for an hour and half before motoring in to the beach. I rigged the kedge, with a long line up the beach, and had a fish and chips supper at The Old Point House. Back on board I moved out to a mooring for the night.

Next morning was bright and breezy. I tacked across to Sandy Haven then ran down to Dale with a scrap of jib and one reef which was enough to send *Sea Fever* along at 5 to 6 knots and I still had to luff in the gusts. After soup, a roll and a coffee in the beach café I went for a long walk round the village and to some high ground overlooking Dale Flats so that I could see the entrance to a creek, The Gann, which runs off of the north east corner. The entrance dries quickly as the tide falls but on springs it would make a pleasant overnight stop.

There is a raised walkway crossing the entrance which can be cleared once the ripples have disappeared. The current runs in quite strongly so be wary.

Underway again I made for Watick Bay and another stroll in the warm sunshine. I still needed supplies as the shop at Dale had closed, so as the wind was favourable I made a quick trip up

to Milford and was back at Dale pontoon by 20:10. A pleasant meal in The Griffin pub rounded off the day nicely.

I slept well until about 05:00 when I was woken by seagulls having a party on the pontoon. They departed when I announced my presence.

Later I motored over to The Gann and felt my way in, there was about 3ft over the bar at high water and in the entrance the water was still running in strongly, at about 3 knots or so. I didn't stay as the tide was already falling outside.

The breeze was light and it was warm in the sunshine so I was content to drift in the direction of Sandy Haven, where I picked up a buoy for an overnight stay. The mobile signal is patchy hereabouts and even on the carpark at the top of the high ground I couldn't get through to home. Luckily a couple in a car realized my problem and loaned me their phone for a quick call. (There are nice people about).

On Thursday the 2nd May I woke to a beautiful morning at 06:30. Again, there was very little wind so I drifted towards the lifeboat station *en route* to the Pembroke river where I intended to overnight after a meal in the town. Still no wind, so engine on.

On arrival at the lock gate into the castle pond I found that the footpath was closed for repairs to be carried out to the gate and embankment. A high solid barrier



Entrance to The Gann

was in place and I didn't like the thought of having to climb it in the dark so I cancelled the idea of staying overnight. I motored back to No.3 buoy for a late lunch, by which time there was a good breeze so I headed for the Lawrenny Arms and stayed on their pontoon overnight after a good meal in the pub.

Next morning I had a leisurely start after a full cooked breakfast in the pub. This is something which can be arranged, but is not always possible. A good start to what was to be an interesting day. The forecast was southwest veering

The Gann, showing the walkway under the water



west 4 to 5 increasing 6 to 7 later. At 10:45 I met John Galvin on the pontoon, an ex-DCA member, who was preparing his North Quay 19 for the season – a really smart and capable boat.

It was blowing hard by this time and I didn't feel like overdoing it so I ran up to Cresswell Quay with the jib for a relaxing hour and a shandy. It was pleasant in the sun and out of most of the wind watching the comings and goings, particularly the goings. Four canoes headed downstream, two kayaks and two Canadian style with three occupants each. They were dressed in street clothes with no buoyancy aids and obviously not used to being in a boat.

I followed them about 20 minutes later under engine and once I was clear of the high ground, into the very strong headwind. In fact I was crouched in the bottom of the boat to reduce windage. I caught up with the Canadian canoes, one with two men and a woman in. They were making very hard going of it but didn't ask for help, or advice, as I passed them, so I carried on but kept looking back.

I was about a mile further on when I saw that they had capsized, luckily, or perhaps because, they were in shallow water, which with the mud was up to their thighs.

I ran back under jib to see them trying to get the waterlogged canoe



Sandy Haven

moving but it capsized again. With engine on I nosed into the mud and called to the men to bring the canoe to me and get in it and get the woman into *Sea Fever*. The woman was most keen to reach the boat and swam a very rapid crawl to reach me. She was well built and with her waterlogged clothing it took two of us to get her aboard.

I then had to reverse off, which was not easy, as with the extra weight we were on the mud. I gave the engine a lot of throttle and eventually we got off but not before the engine had reared up twice taking a piece out of the rudder. (The clip holding the

engine down had slipped, since fixed).

We were not quite out of the woods yet as I wandered out of the channel at the sharp turn and went on the mud again. Without prompting, one man jumped out of the canoe and pushed us off again then got into *Sea Fever* bringing quite a bit of mud with him. Hey-ho.

They wrote down their names for me: Ruaridn Bugian, Sung Katan and Silpa Ram. Once they were safely ashore they offered to compensate me but I asked that they send a contribution to the RNLI. They also took my name and address, but I heard no more. I reported the incident

Sea Fever: National 18 with a Wayfarer rig



to Milford Coast Guard. Having cleared the boat of mud I still had enough water so motored back to Lawrenny and anchored in a quiet spot to have some food. The wind was still blowing hard and although I tried I was unable to make it down to the pool behind the old Admiralty Quay and so I ran up to anchor off of Port Lion for the night. I used a tripping line in case the bottom was foul with old moorings, and buoyed it.

Next morning was sunny but windy at about 5 NNW, and the forecast for the next day or so was more of the same, so I moored up in Edwards Pill and helped my friend around the house and garden.

By Sunday afternoon the weather was moderating and at 15:00 I left the Pill with Oliver as passenger, for the short distance around to Black Tar. He is Corrine's 11 year-old grandson, an accomplished rugby and football player, but he also likes boats. The trouble is fitting sailing in. If possible I will take him out again and possibly introduce him to camping on board.

Having dropped him off I carried on towards Black Pool Mill until I rounded a spit on the starboard hand and everything quietened down. The night was peaceful apart from waking at 01:30 to the sound of the water running past the hull. I looked out but everything was OK. At 08:30 I was on my way to Dale again but stopped at Black Tar to collect some food I had left in the cottage. Another mistake, by the time I got back to *Sea Fever* she was dried out and I had a 2-hour wait before she floated. It took another 8 hours to get to Dale.

Next morning the forecast was SE 3 to 4, occasionally 5 veering S5 to 7 later. With one reef in and half the jib I had another great sail back to just before the Pembroke river, where I anchored for lunch. I put in the second reef and headed for Lawrenny for a shandy, where I made the decision to call it a day. The weather was going downhill again, so it was back to Edwards Pill for a bit more gardening.

I hauled out on Saturday May 11 and headed for home. All in all, a good trip. *RB*