

Hayling Challenge 2024

Skipper name:	Joe Murphy
Boat name:	Dulcie
Crew name(s):	-
Type of boat and description:	Wanderer, 14ft
Rig:	Bermudan
Date of challenge:	August 19, 2024
Time of HW Chi BST:	1240 springs
LW Chi BST:	1716
Start time:	1048
Finish time:	1655
Did you go Clockwise or ACW?	acw
Wind strengths and directions:	F3/4/5
How did you pass Hayling Bridge?	Mast down, rowing, with strong E to W flow
Was the current under Hayling Bridge with you or against?	With, strongly

Joe's report:

Shall I spare you the usual comedy antics at the Bridge and just skip to the bit where I really screwed up and nearly lost everything? Well, maybe not. Since this is a confessional, I ought to provide a bit of context.

High winds were forecast for the first week of Cobnor so I decided to take the plunge on the only viable day of my stay, Monday. The day's breeze was due to rise to F5 at tea time so Joy and I set out at 9am, planning for a fast circuit at high-water, using all the shortcuts, and getting home before things got too exciting.

Except there was a complete flat calm. I rowed out of the Bosham channel, expecting a breeze in the Itchenor Reach. Nothing. After an hour of fruitless rowing against the tide we gave up and returned to base – just as a nice F3 sprang up. I set off afresh, this time without Joy, racing a fleet of 13 or more DCA dinghies that were en route for the Thorney Channel. We had a brilliant sail down to Pilsay Island, where they turned off and I kept going. The run with tide up Emsworth



1 Dulcie pictured in May in the Solent

Channel was fast and fun.

Passing under the bridge was time consuming, partly because my anchor dragged in the stronger-than-expected current, forcing some emergency rowing to the shore. That was followed by a tiring bash down a deserted Langstone Harbour, during which I hove-to to reef because the wind was getting up.

By the time I reached the entrance, much later than planned, the ebb was running fast against the SW breeze. Conditions looked challenging so I put into shore to check all the rigging and then pushed off into the fast stream.

Leaving Langstone was exciting. There were two scary standing waves at the bar which looked intimidating but Dulcie rose up the sheer sides without fuss. I was delighted with her performance. As I hoped, there was enough water to cross the East Winner safely, although a wave swept clear over the bows and into the cockpit. I crossed Hayling Bay quickly on a broad reach, maintaining intense concentration in the waves. The Cambermet weather station log showed that the breeze rose to F5.

Although late, I calculated there would be enough water to use the Sumner Swatchway (assuming it had not silted up, you can never be certain of these shifting sands) and thereby avoid going nearly a mile out to sea to get round the fearsome West Pole pebble spit.

I gazed intently at the patch of water where the swatchway lies. It looked smooth, with no white breakers in sight. It looked ok. With the wind behind me, I surged forwards, fully committed now. However, I made two very serious mistakes. Reasoning that there was no point getting too close to Eastoke Point, where I remembered some isolated rocks on shore, I kept a little further out. But far from providing me with a margin of safety, this decision almost proved disastrous. Nearing where I supposed the swatchway to be, I saw that the smooth water was an illusion. As I got closer I could see a distinct dark line that could only be made by waves. That was my other serious mistake - fool! – not remembering that waves are only gleaming white when viewed from the shore side. Given the wind strength and tricky conditions, I did not dare turn but carried on with clenched teeth. With yards to go I spotted pink pebbles reflecting sunlight under the water and finally knew I was T-boning the spit. I held my breath. The water was inches deep and I thought for a glorious moment that we might slither over the top, but Dulcie crunched to a halt and heeled over, her boom digging into the spit. Panic stations. I jumped out to ease the weight on the boom and sank into gravel that was so disturbed by thrashing waves that it was almost fluid. I managed to lower the sail and free the boom. Without the sail pressing her onto the spit, the boat was immediately pushed backwards by the strong ebb flow from the harbour. Unable to hold her I scrambled aboard just in time.

Despite the gravity of my situation, I felt surprisingly clear-headed and unfurled the genoa which filled with a thump. With a sail up I recovered control and made a ferry glide towards the shore where I would be safe. I could hear an aircraft engine and prayed it was just the Spitfire that regularly flies over the harbour and not an RAF rescue helicopter summoned by a wellwisher. Once clear of the spit, I found to my surprise that the wind was strong enough for us to creep forwards against the ebb tide rushing at several knots through the swatchway. At a snail pace, we crept forwards. Once level with the point, the main flow from the harbour entrance drove Dulcie south, the wrong direction, but we eventually crossed into the shoal waters around the Winner sand, where the flow eased and I raised the reefed main as best as I could.

With a rather creased and baggy sail, not to mention a crumpled and exhausted owner, Dulcie ran into harbour and actually planed briefly.

I got back to Cobnor without further incident, chastened and humbled. My planning had been sound, but the mistakes in execution were dreadfully bad. My time was, yet again, a few minutes over six hours, proving once more that more haste really does mean less speed. This log is thus written as a cautionary tale and not an entry for this year's Challenge from which I hereby disqualify myself.