

Hayling Challenge 2023

Joe Murphy in Wanderer *Dulcie*

Skipper name:	Joe Murphy
Boat name:	Dulcie
Type of boat and description:	Wanderer
Rig:	Bermudan
Date of challenge:	August 26, 2023
Time of HW Chi BST:	1847
LW Chi BST:	1254
Start time:	1020
Finish time:	1626
Did you go Clockwise or ACW?	Clockwise
Wind strengths and directions:	F4 from SW, to F3 WNW later
How did you pass Hayling Bridge?	Mast down, rowing
Was the current under Hayling Bridge with you or against?	With me

My passage plan was an old standard: To leave Cobnor on the ebb, reach Langstone entrance at Low Water around 1pm, then whoosh home with a lively F4 and the young flood mostly behind me. My hope was to crack the six-hour barrier after several years of trying. With this in mind I picked a day with a blowier forecast than I would usually choose for leaving harbour, including F5 gusts, in the hope that more wind would equal more speed.

A freak waterspout was a contingency I utterly failed to consider. Yet one blew up just off the Isle of Wight while I was wave-bashing in Hayling Bay. Yes, I do mean one of those tornado-like columns of water that bring down planes in the tropics. It wasn't *quite* that big but, honestly, you should see the pictures on the BBC and it did explain some weird conditions I encountered.



(Pic of the Wight waterspout, Daily Mail)

It was a grim, wet sail from the start. “Nice weather,” grumbled the crew of a lone dabber I passed near East Head. I crossed the Winner under reduced mainsail alone, the wind on my nose. I was annoyed at having to put in an extra tack to avoid a yacht leaving under engine and bare poles near Chi bar. Wouldn’t you slow down or turn behind the stern of a solo dinghy sailor in largish waves? I was too busy to protest and just turned away. Once clear of the spit, I turned west, expecting a relaxing single tack across Hayling Bay. However, the Wight waterspout rudely intervened.

The first weird event was luminous glow under the sea, similar to light reflecting off a sandbank. It was vivid enough for me to check my position and make sure I was definitely clear of the West Pole spit. The light became warmly coloured, and I had the bizarre thought that I might be sailing into a rainbow. Then the skies opened and dumped gallons of rainwater in a torrent. If this all sounds a bit Twilight Zone, well, that’s how it felt. Annoyingly, as the squall passed over, the wind shifted 40 degrees to WNW – right on my new heading. One moment I was sailing parallel with the distant beach, the next minute I was back into the misery of tacking in waves.

When I read about the Wight waterspout a day later, I immediately checked the timings, which showed that it was whirling away near Bembridge exactly when I was beating out of harbour. The wet front and the wind shift were no doubt influenced by it. The weird glow, I think, was created by sunlight falling from behind a dense cloud curtain, then reflecting off the sea bed.

The next hour was bloody miserable, with waves battering and slowing the boat. I blundered by tacking inland to try to cross the East Winner (even though Mark Tinkler had warned me that the swatchway had vanished) then got caught in surf during my retreat. When I finally entered Langstone entrance, some 3 hrs 15 mins after launch, the floorboards were awash, I was tired, behind schedule, and demoralised

I got a bit disorientated near the Mulberry, but morale improved once I found the main channel and the self-bailers did their job in lovely smooth water. My luck appeared to change at Langstone Bridge where I caught a mooring first go, the mast came down effortlessly, and the tide carried Dulcie calmly into Chichester Harbour. Wow, so easy! It

seemed I had finally cracked that whole bridge nightmare. In my triumph, I decided to save time by raising the mast while still drifting along the narrowed and muddy channel. This was, of course, exactly the hubris that the gods who guard Langstone Bridge had been waiting for and I was duly punished. First the rudder jammed up and I had to remove it, while steering Viking-style with an oar. Rudder unjammed, I got myself pinned to a mudbank while trying to refit it. It took many minutes to get free, after which Dulcie's cockpit was pebbledashed with vile oily black mud. The bridge gods laughed their socks off.

The run home was fast and smooth, taking under 90 minutes. I crunched the gravel at Cobnor after 6hrs 6 minutes, a minute slower than my previous best: a disappointing time that just shows that more wind actually does not always mean more speed.

