

Hayling Challenge 2024

Note: This entry is eligible for both the Hayling Challenge Trophy and also the Allan Earl Trophy

Skipper name:	Sarah Sorensen
Boat name:	<i>Pampootie</i>
Type of boat and description:	11' Lune Pilot, long keel
Rig:	Standing lugsail and jib
Date of challenge:	Wednesday 28 August 2024
Time of HW Chi BST:	0710 3.9m / 1940 3.9m
LW Chi BST:	1240
Start time:	Started about 1030
Finish time:	Finished just after sunset, about 2010 maybe
Did you go Clockwise or ACW?	Clockwise
Wind strengths and directions:	Wind SE F3-4 to start with, decreasing F2-3 and veering W by the end of the day
How did you pass Hayling Bridge?	Under Hayling Bridge mast up, mainsail down, sailed with jib and rowed, with current, wind SSW
Was the current under Hayling Bridge with you or against?	With

Sarah's report:

The Plan

The plan was born of a week of strong wind warnings and mounting cabin fever. By the time I got back on the water after Storm Lilian I was ready for a long sail and the Harbour was feeling a bit small. The Hayling Challenge beckoned.

The parameters were

1 Cross Hayling Bay with a fair wind

2 Exit harbour at LW (unless it happened to be a northerly wind).

No 1 determines the direction of travel; No 2 determines the start time. My preference is to go clockwise in order to get the sea passage done at an early stage but, with a prevailing SW wind, the chances don't come all that often. On Wednesday 28th Inshore Waters said W2-4, but my licked finger and the 7-day land forecast agreed that the wind was starting out east-ish and – according to the Met Office – it would veer west during the day. Find a forecast you like and go with it.

The plan was, roughly, leave Cobnor about HW+4½ and take the last of the ebb down the Harbour, exit Chichester at LW – or, with a neap tide and a light wind, earlier if it looked ok. Fair wind (hopefully) in Hayling Bay; the foul tide would be negligible. Fair wind and tide into/up Langstone Harbour and (hopefully) under the bridge if I could get there before the current reversed at HW-4. At

that stage there would be enough water under the bridge and (hopefully) enough air draft for the mast. Hayling Bridge to Marker Point was likely to be the fly in the ointment, with the current probably becoming west-going while I was in Sweare Deep and an inevitable foul tide in the Emsworth Channel. With a bit of luck the wind might have veered enough to give me a fair wind in Sweare Deep at least. And I had oars (more of this later). Once past Marker Point it should soon be possible to bear away across Pilsey Sands with the tide flooding (though not a very big tide). Then a fair tide and a fair wind (hopefully, as always) back up to Cobnor.



1 Sarah returning to Cobnor (pic by Mike Wooldridge)

My aims were pretty straightforward: stay right way up and have a good long day sailing with more comfort than drama. Last year I set out beating across Hayling Bay in a lumpy sea with the boat hobby-horsing and slamming on the waves and I turned back, deciding it would take an unfeasibly long time to reach Langstone. This year I wanted to have another go.

The Reality

I left Cobnor earlier than planned on Wednesday morning because I wanted to get sailing. It was a joyous 'sheet in and be happy' moment as I left the hard with the wind SE F4. In the Chichester Channel the wind soon dropped a bit and headed me but I was making good progress and sliding south on the ebb tide. I saw David and *Curlew* leave the Harbour in the distance ahead of me – and about 200 Aero racing dinghies streaming away from Hayling Island Sailing Club and out to sea to compete in the World Championships. In spite of 201 people obviously leaving the Harbour on the ebb with no problem, I thought I'd have a little look without committing myself – there was a fair wind to push me back in if needed and only a neap tide against me. Before I'd reached the tide gauge I was thinking that the entrance was a bit rough imho so I ran back and hove to east of the Sandy Point moorings, out of the traffic and the tide. I'd left Cobnor earlier than I needed to and I

was happy here in the sunshine with time for elevenses. Phil sailed past on his way to Sandy Point and may have wondered what I was doing, and for a fleeting moment a day on the beach seemed quite appealing... About LW-1 I had another look at the entrance; the sea state was much better and I beat on out, then saw Pat coming in, having left the Harbour sometime earlier...

After the Bar Beacon I cut the corner a little and at LW I was just west of the West Pole Beacon. The Aero fleet was out of the way, sailing in the back of the bay. The sea was lumpy on the quarter and *Pampootie* was corkscrewing if I sailed low on the wind; steering 280 degrees kept both sails drawing on a broad reach. The boat felt happier and I arrived a convenient distance outside the fairway mark an hour after leaving the West Pole Beacon. It was the first time I'd been out of the harbours this summer and I was loving the wide open space and the freedom but, with the fairway mark bearing 350 degrees, it was time to make for Langstone entrance. I saw no sign of the East Winner but it can't have been far beneath the surface and I was giving it a wide berth so near LW. The tide was by now very definitely flooding and pushing me downwind into Langstone at speed. Jet skis buzzed like mozzies but kept more or less out of my way. In The Run and inside Langstone Harbour a steady F3 with tide made for flat water and a fast and exhilarating sail up to the bridge. I ate my sandwiches while I could, thinking I'd be busy later.

The wind had been veering steadily, as I hoped it would, and was now SSW. I shot through the central gap in the rotten teeth of the old railway bridge, headed up for a moment to drop the mainsail, and then sailed on through the marked gap under the road bridge with jib up and a little help from the oars. So far so good, with fair wind and tide in Swear Deep, but it couldn't last.

By the time I emerged from New Cut, an often windless spot close in the lee of Hayling Island, the current was against me, the wind had dropped to F2-3, and I was barely making progress. As Swear Deep turned to the south and joined the Emsworth Channel, I could no longer point my course. None of this was unexpected but it still gave me one of those moments where the crazy optimism of 'we'll be there in an hour at this rate' is replaced by the realism of 'this is going to take a while'. For some time I persevered with short tacking, mostly outside the main channel in order to avoid the foul tide, but progress was slow. North of Marker Point I got out the oars and then dropped the sails, which were slowing me down in the light headwind. After a few minutes one of the oar collars started gently working its way towards me along the loom of the oar – it looked as if the copper nail holding it in place had broken and the oars had probably shrunk while sitting unused in the sun over the previous week. The collar only shifted a couple of inches before sticking at a slightly thicker part of the loom, but it was enough for the oar to bind in the crutch and make rowing a bit awkward. I carried on like this for a while until, with a sudden jolt, the problem was resolved (after a fashion) when the shaft of the rowlock snapped; I fitted a spare but couldn't get the broken one off the oar – the crutch was jammed tight against the collar – but at least I could now row easily, with just the graunching sound of steel against steel to remind me it needed fixing tomorrow.

Near Oar Rytte – covered by this stage of the tide – a round eyed young Harbour Seal came to visit; they often seem attracted by the rhythmic splash and clunk of rowing. It followed me for some time, swimming only a couple of metres from my transom, diving and returning repeatedly, and we chatted. Suddenly it turned its head as if it heard something – someone calling it home? – and was gone. A big old Grey Seal turned up in its place and fixed me with a lugubrious 'get off my patch' expression. 'Just passing through' I muttered and bent to my oars.

With every minute of rowing the water was getting deeper over Pilsey Sands and the sooner I would be able to head across the Harbour. Opposite Verner port hand mark I hoisted sail, bore away and slowly headed towards Pilsey Island with a fair breeze – only F2 but steady. I judged it was safe to finish off the chocolate and ginger nuts at this stage. I sailed as close to the rhumb line as I could but

the tide was small and the water was thin. A hissing noise from the back of the boat made me look over the transom to see the rudder blade trailing along the sand and I headed up into slightly deeper water.

By now I was starting to feel the effect of the fair tide in the Chichester Channel. The tide and the day were nearly run and I was anticipating that the breeze might disappear entirely with the sun. But in a serendipitous finale to the trip the wind veered to the west and picked up to a F3, and I ghosted back to Cobnor in the light of an amazing rosy sunset, reaching the hard shortly after HW. Watchers on Cobnor Point helped me recover the boat (thank you Pat, Mike, Cath, Neil and Veena the Border Collie, who rounded us up and kept us on track). I guess it was about 2010 when I landed. Not quick but, if I'd wanted a shorter sail, I could have gone to Sandy Point instead. The plan more or less worked out and I was lucky that the wind did what it was supposed to. The oar collar is now secured with a stainless screw. Once again, the Hayling Challenge was a grand day out – and also a complete cure for cabin fever.