

LSC Dee Cruise 2011 – Cruising Log

KevFoote, Sailing Secretary

A dark overcast drizzly morning didn't look too good for the start of 2011 LSC Dee Cruise and not least because the weeks of high winds had been replaced with a dead calm. Indeed the high winds had delayed the provisioning and rigging of both boats, Oliver's 19ft Privateer 'Tarka' would be crewed by Kev and Jim and Eddie's 17ft Sailfish 'Greenfinch' would be crewed by Brian. The foul un-spring like weather did nothing to encourage us to get away on time and indeed we were a bit behind schedule. It's worth mentioning the superb passage plan put together by Oliver, containing amongst other things tides/depths along the route, weather, course to steer, marks and bearings. The plan would never be far from hand.



LSC Clubhouse disappears astern

A decent offing once the new motor was connected to the fuel and started. Both boats were clear of the slip and the dead calm had turned to a light wind and even the rain stopped. Soon as things looked up we were becalmed off Pluckington Bank, time to brew up.

When things picked up sufficiently that Tarka got a little ahead and doubled back to allow Greenfinch to catch up. but coming too close when a sudden gust put Greenfinch about and unavoidably in a collision course into Tarka's port side. Kev a Dinghy helm completely taken by surprise by the un-manouvability of even small yachts compared to dinghies! Luckily the seagull perched on the rail took the brunt of the impact!



Greenfinch makes for the Sea

The light and changeable wind (on the nose), the late start and not least the becalming meant that there was some debate aboard Tarka about the possibility that Rock Gut may not have sufficient depth for a crossing into the Rock Channel. Discretion won and the cruise at this point was changed to a sail along the Queens Channel and return back to the river to find an night anchorage. The intended destination of Hilbre was now not possible within the time, it would take too long with the wind on the nose to clear the much longer route down the Queen's channel.



Twin headsails of the cutter rig, fair wind and sunshine, does it get any better?

To make up for the loss the wind picked up and sun came out as we buoy hopped up the Queens Channel taking in the fantastic view out over the Irish Sea. The tide eventually caught up with us at around 5:00pm and red can C12.



Mannanan at speed up the Queens Channel

Selection of a suitable anchorage for the night came down to two choices, the first New Brighton looked fairly busy with Jetski's and small craft buzzing about, not to mention heavy traffic from Langton lock adding to the already sizeable chop. That left the choice to Egremont. A sharp turn to starboard took us inside the New Brighton small boat anchorage to drop the pick upstream of the groyne off Egremont beach to be greeted by an apparent idyllic stopover.



The lack of swell and pub off the port bow, time to anchor

A quick straw poll decided the crew of Tarka would dine ashore while Greenfinch's crew would dine afloat. Unhooking the trusty seagull from the rail and making for the pub was rewarded shortly after with a round of drinks, good call after a hard days sailing! #

Unfortunately food was already finished, so returning to the tender with the intention of cooking aboard it appeared the swell was much greater. So much so that we all managed to get a soaking getting aboard. To make matter worse the normally unquestionably reliable Seagull outboard refused to even show the slightest interest in starting. It later turned out that the waves bouncing off the seawall had thoroughly soaked the motors fuel or electrics. Personally I think it was no such thing, it was sulking after being hit by a boat. By this time it was mid tide and the chop and tide looked decidedly uninviting test of the oars, so the idea was to find some food ashore and come back at the top of the tide while the flow was reduced and paddle for the yacht.

A suitable restaurant was quickly located on the main drag in Egremont and we enjoyed a good curry and a bottle of wine while we had to wait the tide. Such is the hardships of the LSC cruise.

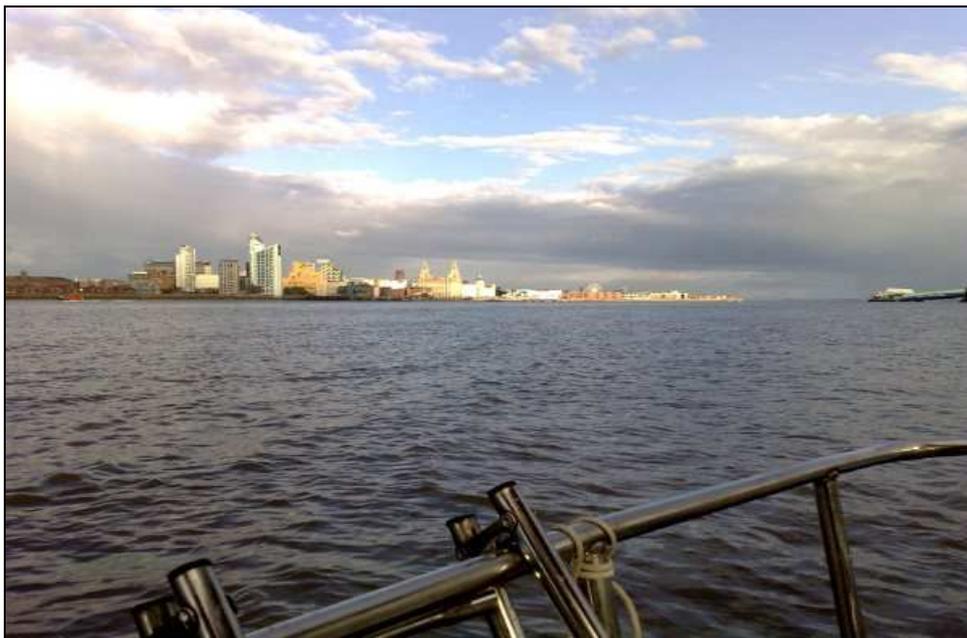
Unfortunately things where about to get worse still, on retuning around 11:00pm we could make no progress against the now sizeable chop and small tide with oars alone. (It later turned out that the bung was had come astray from the tender) There was nothing else to do but turn back for shore. Solid paddling by Jim had us to the slipway.

Now stranded ashore, soaked, with no way to reach the boat the only option was to wait for The nearly six hours for low tide or maybe close enough for the beach to dry out sufficiently to make it on foot or at least shallow enough to restrain the flow.

What followed was an adventure in itself a long midnight walk all the way to Woodside ferry terminal via the Birkenhead docks under the pretext to see the U-Boat. What would have been a generally pleasant experience was pretty wretched on a cold evening in soaking wet clothes. None of which was included in the passage plan and neither was the big thunderstorm that had us running for the bus shelter, our second bolt hole of the evening!

After an hour or so hiding by which time it was approximately 1:30am from the rain and lightening and feeling rather worse than wretched we headed back to the boat. The beach had returned and yacht was now not far from drying out. By the time we carted the huge anchor, motor and outboard out to the surf, Jim had had enough and waded out to drag Tarka onto the beach.

Never has a warm sleeping bag and quarter berth been so inviting. We quickly stripped off and got into our berths. It was 3.00am, shattered and cold. But the boat was dry and warm.



It's hard to believe this is the same spot, it didn't look like this four hours later!

Personally I have never before been aboard and yacht as she refloated in a strong swell and it is not an experience I would like to enjoy again anytime soon. My mechanical sympathy doing slightly worse than my stomach and she rolled on the side swell at anchor smashing her skeg and bilges on the sand. Not even a spell on deck would prevent me from feeding the fishes.

Greenfinch fared no better, both Eddie and Brian were keen to make a early departure after such a poor nights sleep, (though no doubt better than us at Woodside bus station) but at least the brisk wind which was now at our backs would mean a swift sail down the busy river. Dodging RFA Fort Austin making hard work out of swinging for Alfred with her attendant tugs

and a small fleet of chemical tankers heading out to sea, we cut the motor pulled up the Gaff main'n' peak halyard unfurled the big yankee jib and set out at an easy 5knts and a good tide for LSC slip and breakfast, not a single tack was needed to sail the 9 miles back home, in little more than an hour and a half.

Not bad for a little cruise, total mileage approx 28 miles and only minor use of the iron sail. A curry, a few pints and a long walk, a U-boat, swapping paint and hauling gaff cutter sails in the Irish Sea in a brisk wind and sunshine. We wanted an adventure and though didn't get to Hilbre but I think we had one.

Kev

p.s A good Cruising log should have lessons learnt....

- To leave on time the yacht needs to be completely ready, and preferably already at sea, at a mooring.
- The passage plan needs to be flexible and contain information on tides and weather outside the predicted passage.
- Bolt holes are essential; the best ones are downwind and downtide.
- Cruising in company takes practice and skill its not a simple matter of setting off together.
- Take care when going shore, what appears an idyllic anchorage during early evening can turn into a raging hell hole in a few hours.
- There may not be a good nights sleep to be found anywhere downriver.