



Exploring Exmouth in a Heatwave

July 2018

Crew: Lynda

The past few weeks had been really hot with bright blue skies, pleasantly warm and no rain, we didn't expect it to continue for our West Country cruise but it did, for the full two weeks and beyond. A plan had been made to get to Plymouth but after two difficult trips we resolved to go wherever it was convenient and easy to sail to.

High water was in the early afternoon so, not wanting to arrive too late in the evening we broke the first leg at Lymington which is always pleasant. Little wind but after a quick salad on board, we ventured out and let the tide whisk us along to Lymington. We arrived in time for tea and settled in sandwiched between two of the large motor boats that populate the Berthon marina; it's not often we have a sixty foot finger berth to ourselves.



The next day we had the morning in Lymington which was just as well as my phone had slipped out of the shallow pocket of my smart new shorts in a hotel the previous evening; fortunately, some kind person had handed it in and they were open early serving breakfast. We left before the tide turned at Hurst hoping to get through the narrows as the flood eased. This was relatively easy as we'd resorted to the iron sail due to a disappointing amount of wind. The forecast had been for 6-10 Kn from the north east which didn't appear, thunderstorms had also been forecast which (thankfully) also missed us.

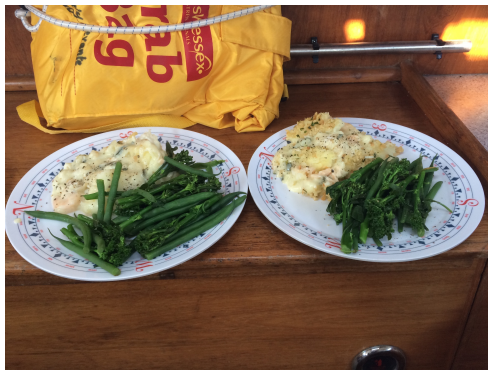


A bit of cloud gave us a break from the sunshine as we past the Needles and out to sea, always a landmark on any west going trip but not for long. With a strong tide we stayed well offshore and away from St Albans Head then straight in to Portland without having



to worry about the ranges as it was a Sunday. The time soon passed listening to weekend boaters making an emergency out of minor difficulties and the heads of the East shipping channel soon opened up for us just after we'd sought permission to enter from Portland Harbour Radio. Having made good progress, we arrived at 7pm, rather earlier than expected after a seven hour trip, just in time to have dinner safely moored up.

13:00. The forecast was promising, Easterly 4, occasionally 5. Full of hope we left just after 11:30 and had a good reach down the side of the Bill. a splendid sail. Naturally as we went dead downwind to round the Bill having to fight a strong tidal set we put the engine on. Rounding the Bill was uneventful, just a few waves from tourists visiting the lighthouse who were surprised to see us so close in. Heading West was more of a challenge due to the huge number of lobster pots scattered about; definitely a time to keep watch! Unfortunately, the engine was never off for more than a couple of minutes due to a fitful wind right on the stern, never enough to maintain five knots.



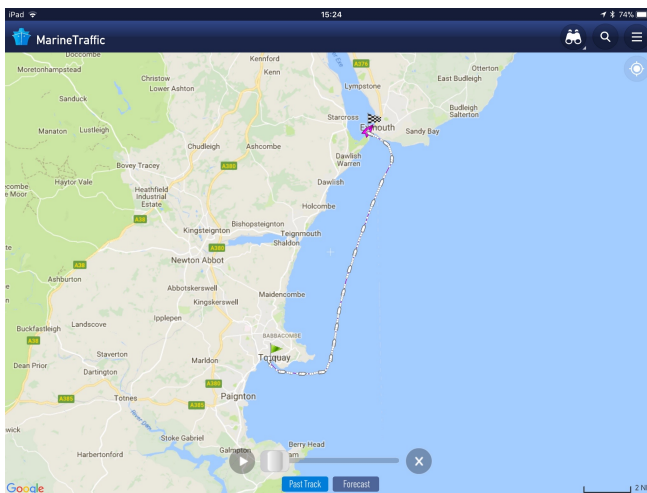
Visibility was excellent so we had unusually good views of the bay as we headed across on a 260 degree course to Torquay, all alone for a change; delightful! The high point of the trip was supper of fish pie, a very welcome interlude that relieved an uneventful chug across a relatively flat sea. Naturally we could see both Brixham and Torquay long before we got there, Thatcher rock in particular took ages to pass, but eventually we reached the town with it's big wheel and moored up in a pleasant berth well away from distractions.

We'd decided to stay for at least two lay days which passed by all too quickly. Naturally we watched England beat Columbia as well as visiting some neighbours who had moved back after living opposite us in Chichester for a couple of years who had also owned a Contessa. It was interesting to discover the western side of Torquay, which, like the

eastern cliffs, is much more attractive than the town centre. We also met some friends who were spending six weeks in the West Country on a rather large motor boat, Lynda was most impressed when she heard that they'd only taken two hours to cross Lyme Bay.



After two days we'd concluded all this socialising was enough and it was time to move on. Originally, we'd planned to go round to Plymouth but we'd met a delightful couple in a Hillyard at Portland who had convinced us that Exmouth was well worth a visit. Apparently, it was not as difficult as the pilot books show to enter, the reason why we'd never been there before. We called the harbour master who said he could squeeze us in provided we didn't mind rafting and set off.



Being a bit apprehensive about entering a shallow river across a rapidly shifting bar we planned to arrive a half hour before high water which would be 11am. Naturally there was no wind so we motored north with a good view of the coastline we'd never seen before up to Teignmouth and on, north east to the entrance of the river Exe. The passage across the bar is very well marked so we had no difficulty crossing it in four metres of water, exactly as predicted. The straight stretch along the front was a different

matter though, we couldn't identify the leading lights and the port had markers were difficult to find. We found that the echo sounder was the best means of staying in the deep water channel which was straight forward in such benign conditions but in other circumstances could have been very different.

The Harbour master with his assistant could not have been more helpful and made us welcome as we passed through the narrow channel under the lifting bridge into the Dock. We were glad of some help to moor up against the "rescue ship" he'd mentioned before, it was huge! The dock now is only for small craft, mainly Ribs with no yachts as permanent residents; there are normally four visitor berths on a hammerhead that can



accommodate yachts, but the ship had taken all these up!

It transpired that the ship had operated in Norway and was being transferred to Cyprus for a new life by an ex lifeboatman, as was the harbourmaster. Along with their friends (also lifeboat crew) they were a great group of seafarers and we got on with them all really well. The ship itself was really impressive, built with no expense spared, but of a more commercial nature than British lifeboats. Despite the sophistication of three helming positions, computer control, variable pitch propellers and a bow thruster they still had difficulty managing it in the shallow waters of the Exe. Eventually, after some worrying moments like getting stuck in the entrance channel with a car tyre round one of the propellers, they found out that draft was 2.3 metres not the 1.5 they'd been told!



Visiting Exmouth turned out to be a brilliant choice there was so much to see and do that we'd never done before and it was a return of childhood holiday memories for Lynda. Exmouth itself is very pleasant with a splendid beach, outstanding restaurants (especially Saveur) and good watering holes (especially Grapevine). We had some delightful walks (and lunches!) to Budleigh Salterton and Torcross although the other side of the river was disappointing.

After four nights we felt we had to move on to Dartmouth, our favourite West Country harbour for at least a couple of nights before returning home. As usual the sky was blue and the sun was out but not a breath of wind. Five hours motoring later we moored up in Darthaven Marina with a wonderful view of the sun setting over Britannia Naval College.



Picking up the mooring was a bit of a challenge as it was down stream and the tide was in full flood. However, we did manage to get the spring on first time but it took full power on the engine to bring the stern in which did a good job of waking up the neighbours.

Not much had changed, it's a lovely place to spend a couple of days taking the ferry across to the town and watching the steam trains chuff past. We took the bus to Brixham for lunch at the Yacht club which really did us proud, we had some excellent fresh Sole! Watching the England match against Croatia could have been a sad occasion

but when we sat down we found we were next to the couple on the Hillyard who had suggested we visit Exmouth; plenty to talk about which made for a very pleasant evening. They'd taken sailed all round the country with various dogs for company so were masters in the use of astro turf.

Eventually we had to return although the tides were not really favourable. Rather than get up at 3pm we chose to plug the tide across the bay for much of the day knowing that it would turn at 5pm. We would have preferred to leave at 9am but getting clear of the berth was going to be more of a challenge than entering as the tide was really sluicing out. We finally got away at 10:30 when it had slackened a bit with the help of our neighbours on an adjacent Vancouver 32 who flatly refused to leave when the tide was flooding.



The crossing was better than expected, naturally we were motoring into a light easterly but made 4.5 knots for most of the time against an adverse tide which was better than expected. Lots of fishing boats provided a distraction and kept away the boredom; it's amazing that with all the sea to be in so many appear on collision courses with us! With a spring tide flowing strongly we took the offshore route around the Bill, although two yachts did go inshore, clearly it wasn't as bad as it might have been with

so little wind. What we did get right was a strong current to the north that whisked us past the island at up to 10 knots.

Rather than split the journey as we had done on the way west we had a lay day to allow a trip to Weymouth and then go straight back to Gosport in one leg. This turned out to be a good choice as Weymouth was delightful in perfect holiday weather. We for lunch with our friends with the power boat who were in Weymouth for the Sea food festival, it's amazing how attractive the offer of a glass of Champaign on board can be...

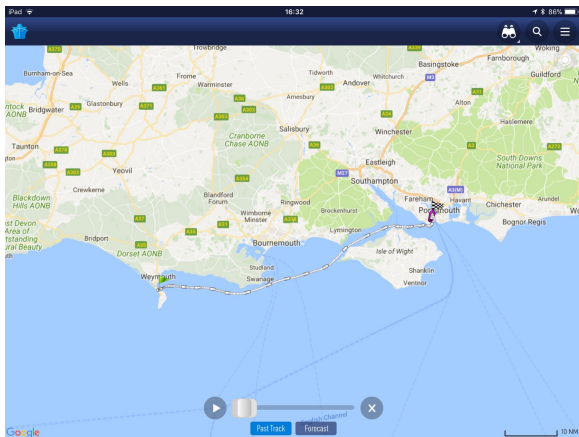
In order to catch the full tide, which was vital to make it all the way to Gosport, we had to leave at 5am and were a little surprised to see that we were one of a fleet of six yachts that had all left together. An absolutely flat calm meant that we could motor fast, leaving just as the sun was rising. In order to catch the full effect of the tide we went straight through the race at St Albans Head which was only rough for a few minutes but did give us the edge on the



other boats putting us back in the lead even though they were a bit faster. Making a steady 9 knots it doesn't take long to cross Poole Bay to the Needles where the Trinity House vessel was replacing the Bridge buoy. The wind had picked up a bit so we were able to motor sail and ease the load on the engine a bit.



Hurst and the Western Solent soon flashed past but the tide had slackened by the time we'd got to Cowes. Fortunately we had an hour of slack water to get across to Gilkicker where the tide turned, we'd arrived just in time! The Solent had not been particularly pleasurable, far too many people, too many motorboats creating wash and too many people calling the coastguard for a radio check.



Just after 1pm we were in back in Portsmouth Harbour. In an eight-hour trip we'd covered nearly sixty miles at an average speed of over 7 knots, our gamble with the tides had paid off.

Overall it had been a wonderful two weeks, the most enjoyable holiday we'd had on Lively Levante despite the lack of wind. Analysis of the log showed that we covered about 250 miles but motoring or motor sailing for 96% of the time; that must be a record, even for us!