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the

WIDER

...all about broad beam boats

option

**CANALS
&
RIVERS**

CROSSING THE WASH

Lily tackles wide waters!

LEARNING THE ROPES

Attending a basic barge handling course

ALSO INSIDE...

TRIED AND TESTED

Aqualine's Canterbury Class

BROAD BEAM BOOKS

Big is not always beautiful!



Travel writer and waterways enthusiast, Alison Alderton, her husband Roger Harrington and Buster the Beagle take their Dutch Barge *Lily* across The Wash to attend the IWA show at St Ives

Across The Wash

So far the summer was proving to be a total wash out but despite high winds and pouring rain we had a schedule to keep and it was with nervous trepidation that we left the safety of Farndon Marina to begin a voyage which would see us crossing The Wash and exploring new waterways in order to attend the IWA show being held at St. Ives on the River Great Ouse.

An overnight stop at Cromwell would allow us to make an early departure on the tidal Trent to Torksey where we would join the Fossdyke. With plenty of fresh in the river we could have left at any time throughout the day however the lock keeper seemed convinced that passage may be closed later that day as more rain was due. At Torksey we encountered what was to be the first problem on this journey, jammed lock gates! Roger being an engineer was quick to offer a hand to the lock keepers on duty and in no time at all between them the

problem was fixed and we were again on our way.

High water levels

Although we have visited the Fossdyke on many occasions we had never seen water levels so high before. At Saxilby, our planned overnight mooring was lost

beneath flood water and the few spaces available on a high wall section were all taken, many craft being doubled up so we had no option but to continue onwards. The BW yard on the outskirts of Lincoln next to University Moorings had some space so we squeezed in. It was just as well as on walking around



TOP: Marker Buoy No. 7 and *Lily* at anchor in the wide expanse of The Wash.

ABOVE: Roger, David and Buster waiting for the off at Boston Sluice.



LEFT: Passing the docks at Boston en route down river to the estuary.

CENTRE: View of the tidal River Witham as it approaches the sea.

BOTTOM: Heading out from Boston following the buoyed channel across Black Buoy Sands.

Brayford Pool, playing host to the annual Waterside Festival that weekend we discovered that the Glory Hole was closed to navigation due to strong currents and so the waiting game began!

Three days later a green light was spotted and at 6am we were away. Our wheelhouse was dismantled in record time and we were soon through the city centre and out into the wide expanses of the remote River Witham. *Lily* loves these wide waters and is a dream to handle on them, with the wheelhouse down and the summer sun finally making an appearance we could not have wished for a better day. A stop at Kirkstead Bridge allowed us to walk into Woodhall Spa and catch a bus back to Lincoln to collect the car, which was desperately needed in order to commute back and forth to work throughout the coming weeks.

At Boston we spent a week on the BW moorings. The town is pleasant and has lots to offer but we had other things on our minds. We had started to paint the roof of our barge back in May but with the atrocious weather we still only had a coating of red oxide primer over the roof. With time to spare we hoped to get at least one covering of undercoat on but unfortunately the weather had other ideas hindering both painting and the chances of an early window across The Wash.

The big day!

Finally the chosen day for our crossing dawned which despite being sunny was windy. There is an old sea farers saying in Boston that if you stand on the steps of the Witham Tavern and look across the river at the trees on the opposite bank and see the tops moving then don't venture out on The Wash! Well they were moving and not just the tops almost

every branch seemed to be bending and jiggling in the breeze. A Force 5 dropping to 4 had been forecast, which was not ideal however the following day looked worse and so we prayed that the winds



would drop before time ran out for our window of opportunity.

Because of the length of our barge we needed to go through Boston Grand Sluice Lock at free flow about two hours after high water. This is when the sea and

the bells of Boston stump ringing away as if in some mad frenzy we headed out onto tidal waters.

Through Boston town and docks the route is surprisingly narrow. We passed the entrance to the forty foot drain, site



Across The Wash



LEFT: Freemans Inner West Cardinal Buoy with the South Lincolnshire coast just visible in the background.

BELOW: *Lily* putting up spray as she thunders across The Wash.

BOTTOM LEFT: Alison and Roger on Blackguard Sand with *Lily* at anchor in the background.

Having left the lee of the sand banks and in open water we were exposed to the prevailing south westerly force four which caught *Lily* on her starboard beam. Despite this *Lily* handled the conditions well and made good progress.

of a proposed lock due to commence construction in late 2007. Beyond the docks are followed by the haven where the Pilgrim Father's memorial is visible above the banks. Passing Hob Hole and the outfall of Hobhole drain we continued southeast, guided by tall light beacons and the training walls of the New Cut funnelling us in a curve around to the Northeast. At Tabs Head we were joined by the waters of the Welland leading in a dead straight channel from the southwest. The wind had slightly subsided and the sky was blue and with no white horses visible we headed out keeping constant checks on our GPS and the course plotted on our charts. We were now on The Wash passing green buoys to port and red buoys to starboard, heading along the channel known as Lower Road running parallel with the South Lincolnshire coast.

Round the buoys

After passing Echo buoy we started a turn to the east which took us past Freeman Inner, a west cardinal buoy denoting obstructions to the east of it, in this case an area of shallows known as The Ants. Roger Sands were now visible to the south a vast mound of exposed sand sometimes populated with seals. Continuing on past Delta, Charlie, Bravo and Alpha buoys we finally rounded the Boston Roads fairway marker buoy denoting the safe entrance to the buoyed channel. We were now heading directly across The Wash towards the North Norfolk Coast, with no further buoys visible we were now truly on our own. We set a course towards a prominent white water tower just south of Hunstanton and continued on this heading until the waypoint entered in our GPS instructed us to turn towards the buoyed channel.



We had no need to hurry so we settled at a comfortable speed and enjoyed the ride. Unfortunately *Buster* our Beagle started to feel a little worst for wear so to make the journey more comfortable for him we set a tacking course to give him a little respite from the swaying motion *Lily* was creating. After a ten minute tack to the north, *Buster* showed his appreciation by retiring below and falling asleep! At the end of the return tack to the south the wind had dropped to a comfortable breeze as we bisected our original route at the waypoint where we turned to the Southeast. Passing Sunk west cardinal buoy on our port beam we headed down the Cork Hole towards No. 2 & No. 3 buoys marking the start of the buoyed channel into King's Lynn.

Across The Wash



Sandbanks

Ahead of us we could see seals basking on the huge sandbanks and with depth running out beneath us we needed to find a safe place to drop anchor. We then needed to await a turn of tide to carry us safely into King's Lynn for our overnight stop. After passing the Tide Gauge in the Bull Dog Channel we dropped anchor just southwest of No. 7 buoy. This was the first time we had used the anchor so it was an anxious few minutes as we waited for *Lily* to come to rest. After ensuring we had sufficient clearance to swing on the incoming tide, raised the black ball signifying "vessel at anchor" and were sure the anchor was holding fast we loaded the dinghy and went ashore onto Blackguard Sand.



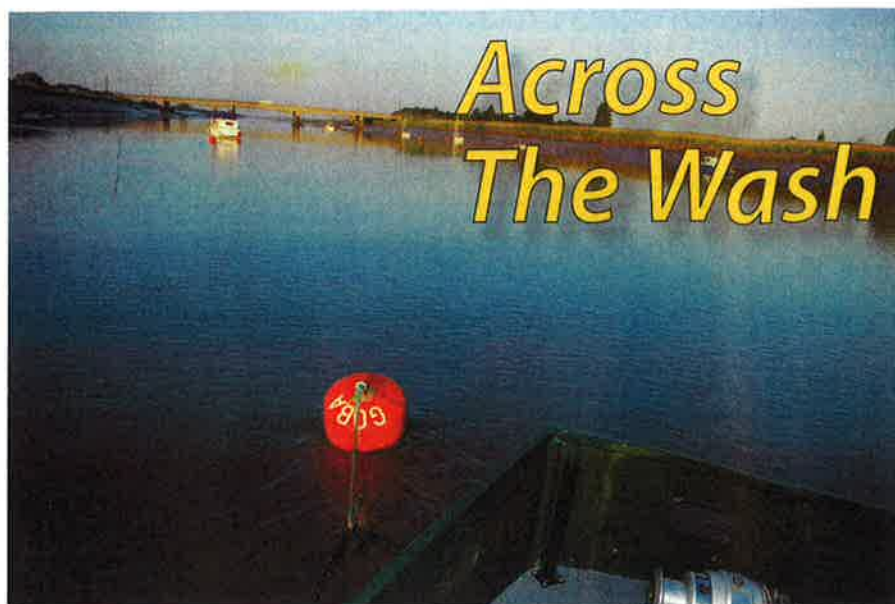
This two hour break gave *Buster* a chance to let off steam and claim the sandbank as his own by chasing off the seals and then guarding his patch by barking at them as they continuously bobbed their heads in and out of the water to catch a glimpse of their intruder. This area is one of the Common Seals strongholds, they favour the shallow, sheltered waters of estuaries and are often seen sunbathing on sandbars around the Norfolk coastline. We settled down and had a sausage sizzle taking in our surroundings and watched *Lily* gently swinging in the tide. When *Lily* had fully turned we packed up and headed back onboard to prepare to get underway for the last run of the day. By the time we had got everything ship-shape and raised the anchor the huge expanse of sandbank we had spent the afternoon on was no bigger than the size of a double bed, the tide had raced in and it is easy to see how people often find themselves stranded by the rising tide.



TOP: There's time for a sausage sizzle on Blackguard Sands before weighing anchor..

CENTRE: *Buster* enjoying the trip as we set off for King's Lynn.

LEFT: Entering the mouth of the River Great Ouse.



LEFT: Swinging on the early morning ebb tide from a GOBA floating buoy below the A47 road bridge, King's Lynn.

CENTRE: Washing the salt off *Lily* at Downham Market pontoon moorings on the Relief Channel.

BOTTOM LEFT: On exiting Denver Sluice we enter calm, non-tidal waters.

OPPOSITE TOP: Alison and Roger aboard *Lily* proudly flying the DBA and GOBA flags.

Into King's Lynn

Motoring in we now had red buoys to port and green buoys to starboard as we threaded our way into the mouth of the Great Ouse. On a strongly flooding tide we were loosing light fast with the sun no more than a dull red orb low in the sky on our starboard beam and the haunting cry of the curlew carrying over the diminishing sandbanks. Various wading birds were filling the pink sky on their way home to roost as we passed the docks where a large ship was berthed. Now running out of daylight we reached the fishing boat quay before rounding the next bend which brought the A47 bridge in view.

There are no public moorings at King's Lynn so we had spoken to the Harbour Master a few days previously and told him of our plans. Navigating the tidal



river to Denver Sluice at night was not advised and we were given the choices of mooring against the fishing boats, who at this time of year were busy with the cockle season so risked being asked to move at some ungodly hour, alongside the pilot boats if space allowed and thirdly on the GOBA mooring buoys. As we had already joined GOBA we con-

tacted them prior to departure for advice and came to the decision that their moorings were the best option for us.

We spotted the three mooring buoys bobbing and dancing with the incoming tide about 200 yards below the A47 bridge. Rounding on the nearest one we brought *Lily* into the flow and slowly approached the buoy. It was a struggle to capture the floating buoy in the strong tide and fading light however, the process was definitely made easier by having a third crew member aboard to lend a hand. Once firmly tethered we turned in after an eventful and exciting eight hour day of cruising leaving *Lily* to swing in the tide overnight.

Lily had really surprised us. Although confident that she could cross this expanse of water we did not expect her to be so steady and ride the rougher spots as well as she did. We had moved my most precious items however, those that remained including books on shelves and pictures on walls did not move. There is no doubt that without the helpful advice from BW and EA lock keepers, King's Lynn Harbourmaster and especially GOBA that this trip would not have come off as it did, without a hitch. To them all we owe much appreciation and thanks. For anyone planning to take this route we would advise them to contact the same authorities and associations before hand, read up on the areas and plan, plan, plan. With the weather being a major factor in any type of sea crossing allow a wide time slot and have a back-up plan.

On to the Fens

The following morning we checked *Lily* over before getting underway to Denver. We left on the incoming tide however





still found many shallow spots so were feeling our way gingerly for most of the route. Denver sluice and lock are an imposing sight but welcoming allowing you to breathe a sigh of relief as beyond lie the gentle non-tidal waters of the Ely Ouse. Our first priority was to locate a mooring where we could hose the remains of the salt off *Lily's* steel bodywork. A spell of good weather followed giving us the chance to get some more paint on the roof.

After a week of exploring, the much publicised Ely train derailment stoppage was still hindering craft from onward navigation so we booked into Denver to take the tidal One Hundred Foot Drain to Earith. To many this is a dull straight route but as the opportunity was there to explore we thought it an offer too good to miss. Locking out in the late afternoon onto an incoming tide we settled down for a three hour cruise. There is plenty to see and not all is hindered by high banks, some parts are in fact very narrow and form part of a nature reserve. On this section a hare pottered alongside us for several hundred feet completely unaware of our presence as the sun faded on another tidal adventure.

When we finally made it to St. Ives, we moored at our show spot feeling relaxed and elated to have achieved so much. The elements had been against us from the start but now at our final destination nothing was going to dampen our spirits. That was not until the IWA informed us we were two foot off our allotted mooring space and had to move up, if only they knew what we had come through to get there!

Well worth it!

This great trip will be the main topic of conversation in our household for many months to come. We had a fantastic time and hope to take to the seas again in the future and are already looking at possible trips involving some coastal work. Whilst the sea is not for everyone what lies beyond for us wider beamed craft makes crossing it tantalizing however, it is a force to be reckoned with and your wits need to be about you at all times but with the right craft and tools there is no reason why a Wash crossing cannot be achieved and enjoyed in safety.

C&R



WAY TO GO! Fact file on this cruise

RESOURCES

Boston Grand Sluice (BW)

Tel: **07712 010 920**

King's Lynn Port Authority

Tel: **01553 773 411**

Web: **www.portauthoritykingslynn.fsnet.co.uk**

fsnet.co.uk

Denver Sluice (EA)

Tel: **01366 382 340**

Great Ouse Boating Association

PO Box 244, Huntingdon, PE29 6FE

Tel: **01480 493 582** (General enquiries)

Web: **www.goba.org.uk**

E-mail: **membership@goba.org.uk**

Maps & Guides

Imray Y9 England East Coast The Wash

King's Lynn approaches are regularly altered owing to shifting sands and channels. Up to date charts are available from the King's Lynn Port Authority Website shown above.



TO CROSS THE WASH WE NEEDED:

Insurance - Contact your insurance company prior to planning a sea crossing. We had to pay a premium for this crossing and stipulations to adhere to which included having a minimum of three crew members and not venturing out in a wind blowing Force 5 or above. Three methods of bilge pump were also required, 2 separate electric pumps and a manually operated hand pump.

Safety equipment - This should include lifejackets for all crew including your dog, lifebuoy and recovery steps for man overboard. Inshore Flare Kit consisting of orange smoke hand flare for use during daytime and red pinpoint hand flares for use at night as an absolute minimum. Flares have a life span of four years after this time they need to be properly disposed of either by handing in to the police or the coastguard. Although not essential we had a dinghy in tow for access to sandbanks or from mooring buoys. A grab bag for use in worst case scenarios is also prudent containing a First Aid Kit, any medication you need, torch, fully charged Handheld VHF Radio, Mobile Phone and ID for all crew members as a minimum.

Communication equipment - Which should include a VHF Radio as this is used by Coastguards, Harbourmasters and Commercial Shipping. A mobile phone is a good back up however you will not be able to contact vessels via this method. It is also essential that you know sound signals in the event of deteriorating visibility so ensure your horn is working correctly and that you have a manual backup.

Navigation equipment - Up to date charts, tide tables and almanac's with your intended course clearly marked. A Hand Bearing Compass and Binoculars. We also had the added bonus of a GPS system and crew members having Helmsman & Day Skipper qualifications. Also make sure that your navigation lights are working and are the correct specification for the size of your vessel.

Anchor equipment - Ensure your anchor and lines are heavy enough to hold ground. It is prudent to carry a spare, a folding version making stowing easier are a good and popular choice. During daylight hours a black sphere/ball needs to be displayed when at anchor; these are available from good chandleries.

And Finally - No craft should venture out onto the sea without the appropriate safety equipment and navigation skills to enable a successful crossing. To find out more about courses contact your local sailing/cruising club, adult education or RYA centres or via the web at www.rya.org.uk. However, if you do not have these qualifications or are not confident then there are professional Pilots available who will see you safely across. Try contacting Harbourmasters or local marinas for a listing of these.