

I was so excited when I found out I was going to take part in a North Sea crossing and explore the south coast of England on the John Laing! I have sailed in the past with SALTS Sail and Life Training Society, Camp Homewood, and on my own boat; so I was delighted to have the opportunity to sail overseas! My voyage was made possible by SALTS and the James Myatt Trust Fund. Captain David Eggert of SALTS asked if he could put my name in for a scholarship opportunity, and I happily agreed! Upon arrival at the dock I was welcomed aboard, found a bunk, and 17 of us sat down around the table for introductions and orientation. We were divided into three watches, and shown the watch and meal rotas.

After consulting the forecast, we planned a route along the coast of Germany and the Netherlands. A plan was made to turn the boat around in the channel so we would be facing the right way to depart quickly in the morning. It was a tight squeeze, the channel only slightly wider than the boat's length. It was a fun first thing to do, and got us into our watches and



working together.

We slipped lines just before 0800hrs and departed Cuxhaven with all crew on deck dressed in oil skins. It was squally, the wind gusting up to 37knots, with what we came to call 'sharp' rain, and rough seas. A rainbow stretched over Cuxhaven as we set sail surrounded by Navy vessels, wind farms, and fishing boats. After several hours the clouds were pushed

aside and the sun shone through. I came off watch and sat with a cup of tea in the cockpit, very warm, cozy and content, and drifted off to sleep. I woke up feeling very sick, and spent the next eight hours horizontal in my bunk, keeping several others in the crew quarters company. We spend the night at a small German island 'Helgoland.'

A change in the weather altered our sail plan to instead head across the North Sea towards England, rather than hug the coast. Seas were a tolerable sort of rough as we headed off on a Port tack, passing massive cargo ships and oil rigs (which look like AT-AT walkers). Sleeping with a lee cloth was challenging for the first couple of nights, especially since I was on the Port side of the boat, and was constantly almost entirely supported by my lee cloth alone. Soon it was easy to get comfortable and fall asleep quickly. I was surprised but pleased with

how quickly I became adjusted to a three hours awake, six hours asleep schedule. One night was particularly memorable. We were running under a clear and star filled sky towards a full moon, it was completely quiet apart from the lapping of water on the hull; it was perfect. I took great joy in looking around and seeing nothing but water and perhaps another boat or oil rig.



We had a lot of fun while on watch! We played word games, listened to music, learned knots and rules of the road, and lights and sounds, and laughed a lot. Tea was frequently made and kept us warm and hydrated on deck in the rain and through the cold night. There was also a magical biscuit tin that was always full, and kept within reach on deck. We wore PFD's and were clipped in at all times, so moving about the boat was interesting; when lots of people were sitting in cockpit you would get caught up in each other's webbing! Going up to the bow of the boat to wrestle with sails was so much fun, plunging through the waves and occasionally

getting completely soaked by a wave. I was very thankful for effective rain gear, and the radiator down below that dried it between watches. Meals were fantastic, lunch was always my favorite; soup or beans with sandwiches on a warm baguette was a welcome warmth on deck.



On the fifth day at 1000hrs we were 26 nautical miles from the coast of England, Felixstone. There was much to see on the approach, and it was an odd feeling to see land again.

It was the warmest day yet and many of us were on deck without oilies for the first time, which was a big deal for us! A cargo ship was leaving as we came into Harwich Harbour, and it was

rather frightening to have such a large ship appear to be pointed right at you, although with the lanes we were perfectly safe; it was enormous, I counted dimensions of 28 x 18 x 16 sea-cans. Felixstone was neat to see, so many ships and huge cranes and much activity. We motored up the River Orwell and tied up at Wolverstone Marina. Before heading off for showers we gathered around the table to make a sail plan for the following day, when we would circle around several bouys that lie just outside the Harwich Harbour.

Without help from the Sea staff, each watch took a leg of the trip, navigating, trimming sail, and plotting positions on the chart. We also did a man overboard drill, lowering the bosun into the water in an emersion suit to recover the bouy victim. There were many boats on the water and it was nice to be amongst them.

On the final morning of the first trip we did a massive clean-up. Certificates were handed out; we all got our Competent crew certificate, and three watch leaders got their 3rd mates ticket. Around noon the crew who were not staying for the maintenance day disembarked, and the rest of us began re-fit work. I helped inflate all the PFD's and made brownies (the most important job of all). The North Sea crossing was absolutely amazing; the community on the boat was fantastic, and we sailed the whole time except a half day perhaps when we neared England and the wind died for a while.



On the maintenance day I went into Ipswich with two others to stock up on food. We tore the list into three and each filled a large shopping cart. When we arrived back at the boat

we lowered the shopping through a hatch and it was quickly stowed, as we had also brought pizzas for lunch and everyone was keen for food. The rest of the crew had been scraping, painting, oiling, and scrubbing while we were gone. In the afternoon I helped deflate, record, and re-pack the PFD's.

The next morning we tidied the boat, and had a meeting about the coming trip. The new crew members arrived just after lunch. I decided to work towards my Watch Leader certificate, so I took my watch through the lifejacket, jack stay, and winch orientation. To get used to using a lanyard we 'raced' around the boat practicing how to clip over safely.

We slipped lines from Woolverstone Marina at 2100hrs, motor-sailing through the night and all the next day on a 3hr-on- 3hr off rotation. We passed the entrance to the Thames during the night, where a collection of lights lead in towards London far off in the distance. That afternoon the rain ceased and it turned into a lovely warm sunny day. Everyone came out on deck and enjoyed some music, lounging on the deck (and in the especially coveted comfortable seat- the inflatable dinghy). Unlike on the North Sea crossing, we only had to be clipped in under four circumstances: if you felt sea sick, at night, when you were told to, and if you wanted to. We arrived at Brighton after dark and put the boat to bed.

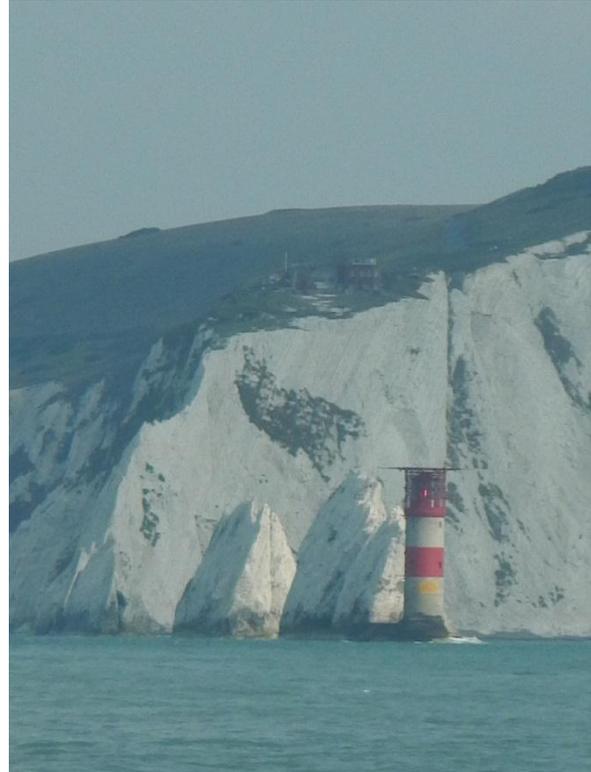
The next morning we were free to explore the town for a couple hours before slipping lines at 1200hrs, raising the mizzen, main, and #2 jib and sailing all day to the Isle of Wight. It was my evening to supervise the cooking, always a great adventure aboard. As we



headed into East Cowes for the night we passed an outgoing ship with enormous wind farm propeller-blades on it, as well as two really neat looking old forts!

The shipping forecast roused us the next morning, and after breakfast we were again given some time to explore the town. Later, the seas were a bit rough but the wind was amazing, a

combination that resulted in some of the crew feeling queasy. At 1800hrs we rafted to a Sea Cadet boat in Weymouth and had dinner. Doing dinner dishes was an exciting event each night. Everyone crowded around the table with wash-up-buckets and drying towels, music was blared, and productive chaos ensued, with people passing (throwing) plates and cups to (at) one another, bubbles everywhere, and everyone laughing and singing. Our best record was completing all the dishes, including pots and pans, in just two songs time. Later that night we toured the Cadet boat, and they toured John Laing; it was neat to see!



In the morning, after a look around Weymouth's beautiful beach and narrow busy streets, we slipped lines for Poole. It was a crew member's birthday that day so a special cake was made and the evening was one of celebration. The group that was on breakfast the following morning were whispering together and being very secretive, and we found out why when the next morning we woke up to find the table piled high with a fantastic breakfast of bacon sandwiches, sausages, hash browns, and beans. They had slipped away the night before to buy the things they needed, had been up for two hours cooking! It was a feast! I spent most of that day at the helm; there was little wind, but it was blue and sunny and beautiful. Many of the crew were lounging around the deck, enjoying the sunshine. The Needles were an incredible sight as we passed at the west side of the Isle of Wight and headed into the Solent! Navigation there was tricky as there were so many boats going in and out. It was especially difficult when the mizzen was dropped and completely obscured my starboard view. Skipper called through the sail to me to let me know where boats were, until they stowed the sail. The other watch took over and we anchored in Osborne Bay. There the dinghy was launched and the crew did their rowing tests for their Competent Crew certificates. The anchor was weighed and we made for John Laing's home berth in Southampton, the crew singing the entire way. A lot of the boats we passed knew the boat and our Skipper, and they *all* heard us singing.

Our final morning we woke to the Lion King song for the last time, and started packing up and cleaning the boat top to bottom. Afterwards we gathered on deck and talked about our trip. We got our logbooks recorded and signed, and received our certificates, I got my Watch Leader certificate! We then lugged all our bags over onto the pontoon, and took group photos

along the boom before disembarking. I was very sad to be leaving the boat and the crew. We had created a great community, everyone was so fun, I enjoyed being crew and a watch leader very much.

I had such an amazing time with the crew and sea staff aboard the John Laing. I learned a lot about the boat and sailing, and gained valuable leadership skills. We had so much fun exploring many beautiful and fascinating places. I will remember this trip forever!

