

## Adventures through Lincolnshire Part 3

If you missed Parts 1 and 2 in the last two Newsletters I should briefly bring you up-to-date. I left Beverley Beck on Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2008 in my yacht, a Macwester 27, 'Nora Harfield'. She has a cruising draught of 4 feet, an air draught of 39'-3" with the mast up and 7'-1" when lowered.

The purpose of my passage was to see if a yacht could still complete the historical circular passage around the island of Lincolnshire. I had heard that parts of it were shoal and the air draught in parts low. In earlier years these restrictions had proved to be a problem for yachts attempting it.

To reassure others who may have dismissed the passage because they thought their craft was over the limit I intended to make a record of water depths and air draughts encountered during the trip to provide the information not available in any other guide. My wife, Jackie and our dog, Fudge accompanied me as far as Boston where unfortunately Jackie felt poorly and had to return home.



*Boston Marina*

I returned to Boston a week later with club member, Carl Prigent, my wife was recovering from a kidney infection and still not well. By 0605 hours Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> July we had lowered the mast and were making our way into Boston's Grand Sluice lock. The railway bridge before the lock had a headroom of 14 feet. Entering the lock and looking towards the salt water end we find there is a pipe bridge and a road bridge which cross overhead a few feet apart. Their air draught will vary with the tidal height when the sea gates are open, if you allow 14 feet you will not be far out.

With our mast down we required 46'-0" l.o.a.. The lock here is 55 feet long but when I looked at it I could see only 51 feet in which to safely manoeuvre. With all my top instruments hung astern I was worried in case I damaged something in any surge. I discussed this with the lock keeper the night before and must thank him again because as we approached the lock, with a big smile he opened all the gates and let me through on a level into the Haven (2 ¼ hours before high water). I could not thank him enough and said so when I returned later that day. I did notice that most of the yachts berthed at Boston had a roller fitted on top of their cockpit crutches so that the mast could be rolled forward when lowered, reducing their l.o.a. It was such a good idea that I copied it and now have one fitted.



*Boston Lock*

Today the tide was middle range ( 8.4m at Albert Dock, Hull) and I observed that there was no tidal flow of water only a slow rise, we did not start to push a perceivable flood until we were clear of Boston Town. What conditions would have been like when the tide started to ebb I do not know but on this tide the water was like a pond.

Before we could raise the mast we had to negotiate the three town bridges all within our first ½ mile on the tidal Witham. First was a footbridge where we had a headroom of 16'-6" and a 12 foot depth. Second a road bridge with 14'-6" and a depth of 14'-6" and the third, a road bridge with 16'-0" and a depth of 11'-0". There is a fourth, a swing rail bridge, always open when not in use, about a mile down from the Grand sluice.

Just below the swing bridge on the West bank we saw the new Black Sluice tidal lock, its construction nearing completion. This is the first big step in a fens waterway link joining the Rivers Witham, Glen, Welland, Nene and Ouse together to create a new safe waterways route of over 149 miles for leisure craft. The Black Sluice Lock (now open) connects the tidal Witham to the South Forty Foot drain.



*Tabs Head- Joining of Witham, Welland and Wash*

By 0730 hours Carl and I had raised the mast, we were fully rigged and at Tabs Head with a depth of 29 feet, the confluence of the rivers Witham, Welland and the Wash. Gale warnings were being given for the Humber area so rather than take the risk we turned into the river Welland still on the flood for a new marina, the Fosdyke Yacht Haven at Fosdyke Bridge where we arrived 1 hour later. They have excellent pontoon moorings but also a flood tide that can be a bit strong so try to arrive at slack water (20 minutes after High Water, Hull.) You will find berthing much easier. It also helps if you telephone ahead, we found the staff very helpful telling us exactly how to approach the marina and where to berth. We found a good depth of water on the berth which at low water was reduced to about 3'– 6"

Leaving the boat in safe hands for a few days at Fosdyke, Carl and I returned home.



*Approaching Fosdyke Yacht Haven, River Welland.*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July with a good forecast, the seas having fallen away, I returned to the Fosdyke Yacht Haven with another club member, Dave Legge, who had offered to crew for me for the sail back to the Humber.

At 0930 hrs., we left Fosdyke yacht haven punching, 2 knots of flood, 1 hour before high water, to the Wash. It was a bit misty and the sun was breaking through in a light easterly. As we departed I noted we had 19 feet under our keel.

As we motored by Tabs Head beacon from the River Welland into the Wash it was slack water. Crossing over the shallows before the Boston Deeps we had a reassuring 22 feet under us.

From the Boston Deep buoyed channel we took the buoyed Freeman channel out into the middle of the Wash. Glancing behind I saw a fleet of fishing boats had left the River Witham from Boston and were all making for the Wainfleet Swatchway a smaller, shallower channel which would have required us to have local knowledge.

By 1230 hours we were passing the Roaring Middle buoy making 6.8 knots s.o.g. our sails up but with the easterly now blowing F.3 we were heading into it and only occasionally catching some. Dave was experimenting with a an A.I.S. module wired into his laptop. It was working and told us of two ships leaving Kings Lynn, we later saw them coming up astern out of the mist. I was really very impressed.

By 1400 hours we were passing the brand new Lynn Offshore wind farm off Skegness, still being built by a ship with legs (see picture below). There amongst the windmills we saw the fishing fleet out of Boston busily going about their trade.



*Windfarm under construction off Skegness.*

The easterly now increased from F4 to F5 at times giving us an s.o.g. of 7.5 knots, but within an hour we were back to F4 and an hour later F3. After a further hour F2.

By this time it was 1730 hours and we were occasionally catching the silhouette of Spurn through the mist.

Entering the Humber we caught the young flood which soon made up for our lack of wind, this was to carry us along nicely. By Bull Fort we were making 7.3 knot s.o.g., a speed we were to average all the way up to Hull Marina.

At 2115 hours after 79 n.m. we locked back into Hull Marina 12 hours after leaving Fosdyke Yacht Haven. I had completed a long-held ambition, to do 'The Grain Run' the 166 nautical mile Hull to Hull circuit of Lincolnshire.

I write this in the hope that the information given in this narrative will encourage others to also experience this lovely waterway.

I found that the maximum size of vessel to complete the trip without difficulty could not have:

an air draught of more than 9'-3",

or a water draught of more than 4'-0",

or if you are prepared to push a little mud 4'-6",

or you really wanted to struggle and possibly turn back 5'-0".

As to which is the easiest route round, I would say *anticlockwise* because sailing clockwise you will spend too much time fighting the tides. Travelling anticlockwise with the right passage plan the tides will always be with you.

Martin Benson