“We didn’t mean to go to sea”
Cruising in Wayfarer 10375
between Helford River and Plymouth
Summer 2004
by
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Front page:
The South Cardinal buoy off Gribbin Head
Our voyage, from Falmouth to Plymouth, was not quite as unexpected as for Arthur Ransome’s Walkers, but it was exciting for us Walkers too. We bought a new Wayfarer World (10375) in October 2003 and spent some of our spare time during the winter making a tent for it.

The Wayfarer Cruising Secretary advised us to leave our camper and trailer at Mylor Yacht Harbour for the 3 weeks of our cruise. Previously we had owned a GP14 and sailed it on Loch Ness, Loch Lomond, Lough Derg (in Ireland), Ullswater, Derwentwater etc. But we never intentionally slept in it and were looking for a boat that we could cruise in. In 2000 we passed RYA Dayskipper Theory and Practical Examinations. Since then we have chartered yachts in Plymouth and sailed them to Penzance, Guernsey and north Brittany. We enjoyed this but hankered after something with more flexibility and more within our budget. So we bought Squacco. (Her name is that of a kind of heron, common in the Mediterranean, but very unusual where we saw one in 2002 on the River Trent)
Before we went to Falmouth we had had a week’s proving on Windermere. Although a beautiful place we found it unsatisfactory for our purpose because of the unpredictability of the wind. At one point we were on a beam reach when the sail gybed suddenly and the boom hit me a real corksucker on the head. We did however gain experience of the boat and of boat camping. I should say also that we have been back-packing over many years and brought that experience and equipment to dinghy cruising.

We arrived at Mylor on Monday 19 July and used the first days to get used to the place, the conditions and the boat. We put Squacco into the water down the public slipway using a block and tackle. Richard then rowed round into the marina. We had been disappointed that, with the large store box at the stern of the boat, we had been unable to fit oars longer than 8 feet long under the thwart. The problem is that the hands are rather a long way apart. Nonetheless he was able to develop a style which was not too uncomfortable, and could row for
several miles without becoming over-tired. We did find it a bit expensive to use the marina but enjoyed having the showers and toilets. And we were able to empty the baby Porta-Potti that we carry on the boat. We have no wish to be part of a bucket and chuck it culture. The little flushing loo works well but needs emptying fairly frequently to avoid it smelling with the rocking and rolling treatment it gets.

One of our important tasks was a pilgrimage to see *Wanderer* (Frank and Margaret Dye’s Wayfarer 48) at the Maritime Museum. We rowed out of Mylor marina, picked up a mooring, hoisted sail and tacked up Carrick Roads to Falmouth Yacht Haven in a warm and sunny SW3-4. We were put among the tenders but still charged £14.50 a night for the privilege. When cruising we like to wake at 0530 to listen to the splendid UK Theme and the Shipping forecast. Sadly the UK Theme has now been axed by a bureaucratic controller of Radio 4. Waking so early is not strictly necessary because the relevant parts of the forecast are repeated on local radio later. but we
tend to take quite a time to convert the overnight tent into a shipshape boat so we like an early start. This particular morning we heard the shipping forecast but then stayed snugly in bed until 0730 listening to the rain beating on the tent.

We were at the Maritime Museum ready for it to open, paid our entrance and walked quickly round looking for the famous craft. We were told that it was at Ponsharden, the other side of Falmouth. A very nice man offered to show it to us that afternoon. So we went shopping, principally for gas for cooking. We use a Trangia stove which was originally designed for methylated spirit but has an adaptor for Coleman’s gas. It is an excellent cooker, stable and well sheltered from the wind. The gas is a little expensive but we would recommend the cooker highly. It folds very small with pans and a kettle. We use it when back-packing too.

We had a pasty lunch and sailed back to Mylor where we stored some of the spare gas canisters in the vehicle. Then we walked around the coastal footpath to Flushing, caught the ferry back to Falmouth and walked to Ponsharden. We found the very nice man who uncovered the famous Wayfarer. We were surprised by its basic construction and impressed by the wonderful feats accomplished in it. It had sailed, for example, to Norway and Iceland.

On Friday 23 July we listened to the UK theme and shipping forecast: NW3-4, slight sea and good visibility. So we sailed down Carrick Roads and south-west to Helford River. We picked up a visitors’ mooring off the Ferryboat Inn and were soon visited by the mooring officer who relieved us of £8 for the night. We had taken the precaution of bringing a copy of Daphne du Maurier’s *Frenchman’s Creek*, which we read aloud to each other to enhance the atmosphere of Helford River.

The following morning was beautiful, still and sunny. Our boat tent is actually two tents, joined by a 2 foot wide strip of fabric which can be unzipped either or both sides to provide entrances. It is supported by flexi-poles fitted into holes in the rubbing strake we have fitted around the gunwale. At one end the boom is supported by a stainless steel support which fixes on the rudder gudgeon and pintle. At the other end it is supported by a removable gooseneck higher up the
mast than the fixed one. The tent is fixed under the boom. It is huge (by back-packing standards) but we have so far had no problems with windage. Because it is in two parts we can erect just the forward section which encloses the loo. We also have a flysheet over the boom which acts as a sail cover and keeps the rain off the flatter section of the tent. On hot days we can leave up just the flysheet which provides shade. The tent is made of waterproof breathable fabric which allows light through and is pleasant to be in. It has no windows but the side doors and the front can be opened. At the back it has a large semicircular section with double zip so that it can be tent fabric, midge netting or opening. We generally sleep with the end open or covered in netting when in a private place so we can wake to the dawn and enjoy the natural environment from our bed.

That early morning on Helford River we took down both tents but left up the flysheet supported by the flexi-poles. There was not a breath of wind so we rowed with the tide up the river. We visited

Celia cooking on Helford River.
The flexi-poles supporting the flysheet can be seen.
Frenchman’s Creek which was rather overgrown with many fallen trees. That night we anchored in Mawgan Creek, and as the tide ebbed away, took the ground. We were relieved to find that Squacco settled gently on the mud with no ill effects. We could see that the anchor was behaving itself. We were also able to hoist our riding light. We have 3 things powered by the sun: a radio which can be wound up by hand and is also a fluorescent light, a torch which is waterproof and floats, and the top of a light intended for the garden which is made of stainless steel and plastic. It charges in the day, turns itself on when dark and off again when light. It is probably not bright enough to be a totally legal anchor light, but its light emitting diodes can be seen from several hundred metres.

The following morning we were high and dry. After breakfast watching sandpipers and curlew, we prepared for sailing and waited for the tide to return. The forecast was for F3-4 NW again but it seemed breezy so we put a reef in the mainsail. We sailed straight down the river, overtaking a small motor cruiser in the mouth. As we entered the sea the wind was force 5NW and we had a splendid reach back to Falmouth, achieving 6 knots most of the way. As we passed Pendennis Castle the wind became stronger. We found that reefing the genoa was effective and the boat stayed quite well balanced. At Mylor we picked up a mooring upwind from the marina entrance, and then rowed in. We were pleased that the tent had no problems with the wind.

The following day we went for a walk around Mylor Bridge. Then we “motor-sailed” up to Truro to use the launderette and replenish supplies. We don’t actually have an engine so we put in the sliding gooseneck and a reef in the sail to leave plenty of headroom for the oarsman. It all worked quite well except when the wind was actually against us. We returned on the same tide.

29 July dawned. The forecast was 3-4, possibly 5 E veering W and then NW. There would be some rain as the front went through. We had not thought that we would cruise away from Falmouth though we had brought charts and pilotage for all the local ports—just in case. That morning we said, “Let’s go to Mevagissey.” The tidal stream atlas indicated that we should leave at 1300. We collected the
sou'westers we had ordered from the chandlers a few days earlier, had a light lunch, and set off a bit late at 1430. The wind was southerly F5 as we tacked down Carrick Roads. Off St Mawes the rain really came down. We were glad of the sou'westers. We had dry suits packed away but were wearing double-layered water-proof trousers and sailing tops. We had buoyancy aids and life jackets with harnesses so we could clip on if we felt the need. It was really tipping it down but we agreed to have a look anyway.

And so we went out past the light house on St Anthony’s Head. The wind had veered westerly. The rain had lessened. We expected 3 hours of wind and tide together, with improving visibility. We decided to go. Dodman Point was shrouded in rain and mist so we set a course of 070°C, intended to clear any overfalls. We planed along with the wind almost from behind and were off Dodman Point by 1800. Here there was quite a swell. As we passed, the wind veered again to NW and the sun came out giving us a splendid reach down to Chapel Point. Leaving the East Cardinal buoy with its mournful
bell to port we tacked in towards Mevagissey. Just outside the entrance we lowered the sails and rowed into the outer harbour, tying up to the South Pier. We have big fenders, for rolling the boat on as well as fending, and we used these to keep us off the abrasive wall. The tent was soon up and we went in search of a fish and chip supper.

The following morning we walked round the harbour to see the harbour master. The notice said:

- Boats up to 20ft £10
- Boats up to 30ft £10
- Boats up to 40ft £10
- Boats over 40ft £10

We climbed up to his office overlooking the harbour. “I’ve just brought in my 160 ft motor launch,” I told him. He looked concerned, and saw across the harbour our tiny Wayfarer. “Actually its less than a tenth that long. It’s just that your charges don’t seem
Looking back at Dodman Point

Moored at Mevagissey
very sensible.” So he let us have two nights for £10. We spent the day exploring the town and writing postcards sitting on a seat on the coast path.

Next morning we sailed north round Black Head, and anchored for lunch off a lovely beach. It would have been peaceful had a couple of boats towing water-skiers kept further away. The wind was variable F2-3 and we sailed across St Austell Bay and round Gribbin Head with its red and white striped daymark. As we sailed towards Fowey the light wind was directly from astern so we got out the whisker pole and slowly and sedately entered the port. This also had associations with Frenchman’s Creek. We looked at the forts on either side of the entrance and imagined the pirates “liberating” the Merry Fortune one dark night. The wind gradually increased as we sailed up river so much that when it came to tying up to a pontoon just before Mixtow Pill, several of the yachtsmen already there came on deck to admire the way we squeezed, at speed, into the tiny space they had left us. (Or perhaps they thought we were going to ram their
Entering Fowey

Berthed at Mixtow Pill
boats!) We erected just the front part of the tent and enjoyed a meal in the evening sunshine. Everywhere we went we met people who were surprised that our little boat with its tent had sailed from Falmouth. The person who was collecting mooring dues could not believe we were sleeping in the Wayfarer.

Our sleeping arrangements involve raising the side thwarts and placing four plywood boards across them. This makes a large platform on which we place Thermarest mattresses and a waterproof sleeping bag. The plywood boards have another purpose: they can be bolted together with two smaller boards to make the frame of our tender. It is then covered with a skin of waterproof cloth. It floats by itself but we tie our large fenders on the sides to give added buoyancy and stability. It’s disadvantage is that it takes a long time to assemble or dismantle, and we have to be careful not to puncture the skin on anything sharp.

One of the fairly obvious things you can do on a boat is drop things over the side. At Mylor we had managed to lose a burgee while trying to fix it to the mast. Here in Fowey Richard stretched over the stern to ship the rudder and saw his watch, which had never fallen off his wrist before, glinting silver as it disappeared into the depths. It was high tide and too deep to retrieve.

We used our handheld VHF for the first time to call the water taxi the following morning. It was great to hear and be heard loud and clear. The RYA radio course we had done a few years before gave us knowledge and a licence but also confidence in using it. The taxi took us to Fowey town. We enjoyed a wonderful walk along the SW coast path round Gribbin Head close to the daymark, and then on to the crowded beach at Polkerris, where we awarded ourselves a clotted cream tea. Then we struck off back to Fowey across the headland using the Saints’ Way. In Fowey we showered at Gallants Sailing Club before getting the water taxi to return us to our little ship.

The following day, 2nd August, we waited for the strong ebb tide to slacken and then took Squacco down to the Town Pontoon where one has up to 2 hours free mooring. We did some washing, a little shopping and emptied the loo. As at every stop we filled up our two 5 litre containers with drinking water.
Then we set off up river for Lostwithiel. It was low water and we were soon aground. We anchored and soon there was enough depth to proceed. Twice we again grounded. It might have been sensible to wait longer but this method at least enabled us to know where the channel was. It was not well marked. It was a stunningly beautiful journey, and when we were forced to wait, we watched herons and little egrets as well as other water birds. Eventually we reached a quay where several boats were moored. Ahead was the railway bridge. We stopped and walked on to see if it was worth lowering the mast. We couldn’t find anywhere suitable to stay on the other side so we put up the tent where we were and put out the mooring warps to deal with the tidal range.

We very much enjoyed Lostwithiel with its interesting old buildings. The following day we had a lovely circular walk including visiting Restormel Castle which is supervised by English Heritage. But before that we celebrated our 457th Wedding Monthiversary, as it was 2nd of the month, with a meal at the River Brasserie.

On our way up the River Fowey
Looking out of our open window at Lostwithiel
The next day, August 3, a light westerly wind was forecast. At high water we sailed gently down to Fowey, stopping at the Town Pontoon for water. Then straight off again. But the wind dropped and we rowed for a few hundred metres past Polruan until we reached the sea. Outside, the light westerly returned and we set a course of 100°C towards Rame Head which we could see in the distance looking like the head of a snake. At one point off Polperro the wind died but it was soon back and gradually increased. Polperro and Looe were alternative ports but I was glad we were able to avoid the long row to shore.

We goose-winged most of the way to Rame Head where the wind was F4. The tide had now reversed and the wind against tide made it quite choppy. In the shelter of Rame Head the wind weakened and we made slow progress against the tide. So slow in fact that we were offered a tow by a yacht motoring past. We let him go into the distance. Then the wind perked up and we began a fine reach. We
were gaining on him but were unable to catch him before he had anchored off Kingsand. Anchoring near him, we saw his binoculars and camera come out as we put up our tent.

This was another occasion when we were entertained to rock and roll by some water skiers. It made it quite difficult to prepare our meal. The night was beautiful with all the twinkling lights of Plymouth Sound. The wind remained quite fresh NW. We were a little less sheltered than we had expected and so we checked several times in the night that we had not drifted.

By morning it was flat calm. We watched a glorious dawn through our back tent opening. Then we sailed across to the marina at Queen Anne’s Battery, keeping out of the way of a frigate heading for the sea. In Mylor we had met a couple on a 46 foot yacht who told us they had been worried about us when we had set off for Mevagissey. They were thrilled and astonished to see us alive and in Plymouth.

We had not intended to sail so far (102 nautical miles), but we had only sailed when the forecast and the tides were appropriate. We had
enjoyed a wonderful voyage and gained valuable experience. The following day we travelled back to Truro by train, on to Falmouth by boat and to Mylor by another boat. We collected the vehicle and trailer and took Squacco home.