

## **GIRLGUIDING NORTH EAST ENGLAND CHALLENGER SAILING EVENT 2011**

The Girlguiding NEE challenger sailing event began with us wondering whether we were actually at the zoo with lots of talk of elephant ears and snake pits. Ask one of the crew members if you want to know more!

Below we have tried to give you a flavour of our adventures on an ex-round the world racing yacht.....

### **Saturday 30 July 2011**

Ten Senior Section members from across the region and two “older” leaders converged on Hartlepool to start our adventure. Luggage was stowed away and bunks allocated along with life jackets and wet weather gear. Training got underway and this was followed by prepping the yacht for sea which entailed rigging the sails. Showers followed as it would be some time before we saw showers again and an early night was had as we had to be up at 5.00 the next morning.



We were really pleased that our Regional Chief Commissioner, Hilary was able to join us on the Saturday. She had chance to meet everyone and learn some nautical skills before wishing us well saying that she would certainly not be thinking about us at 5.00 the next morning!

### **Sunday 31 July 2011/Monday 1 August 2011**

We were rudely woken at 5.00 am with the generator bursting into life – this became our alarm call. Life jackets were donned and everyone was up on deck eager to start our adventure. Once through the lock gates of Hartlepool marina we were out on the open sea and heading towards Holland. Our first job was to hoist the main sail – no mean feat when we had to pull half a tonne of sail cloth 100 feet up the mast – this involved lots of hard work and loud encouragement from the rest of the crew as we took it in turns to sweat and tail followed by lots of frantic winching at the end. Sadly the wind was in totally the wrong direction so we had to motor sail in a sea with a large swell. Before long people started to feel unwell with only three of us actually managing breakfast! As the morning progressed a few people did eat ginger biscuits with varying degrees of success.

Gaynor manages to sum up her experiences of being on “green watch”, as it is affectionately known by the permanent crew – “I can’t remember much after we left Hartlepool. Seasickness hit me full force. 20 hours later after a lot of unpleasantness and a lot of sleep, I found my sea legs!”

After lunch (for those who could manage it) we split into our watches. Usually the Tall Ship Youth Trust have Port and Starboard watches but we, in typical Guiding style, had other ideas and had already called the watches Jack Sparrow and Davy Jones. Jack Sparrow watch headed to bed for three hours – being advised on the best way to get to their bunks without being ill – basically get there as fast as you can and lie down quickly. To try and make the sailing less lumpy, Steve the skipper decided to change course and we hoisted two more sails. After a couple of hours sailing we reverted back to motor sailing and the course we needed to reach Holland.

Watches continued through the night as we sailed across the North Sea enjoying a lovely clear but cold starry night. People began to feel better and the smiles and chat returned. Haribo sweets are great morale boosters! Amy and Jane summed up the night sailing experience - “Getting up every three hours is not as bad as it sounds. Being on deck in the middle of the night is actually quite a nice experience. Seeing the sunrise on the 4.00 – 7.00 am watch was memorable as we navigated through the numerous oil and gas rigs”.



33 hours and 250 nautical miles later we sighted land - Schevenigan port on the outskirts of The Hague. As we motored into port we had to stow the sails. Once along side, Davy Jones went below decks to clean and Jack Sparrow scrubbed the decks in true nautical fashion with water and soap suds everywhere! Once the yacht was ship shape there was some time to relax and enjoy the surroundings before dinner. This was then followed by long awaited showers which must have been a good half a mile away. We all seemed to be suffering from land sickness as we compared notes on how strange it felt to be on land and how we all nearly fell over in the showers! Refreshed and looking forward to a day in Holland we had an early night.

## **Tuesday 2 August 2011**

We got a welcome lie in until 8.00 when our generator alarm burst into life. After breakfast and tidying up the yacht the day was our own. It was a beautiful sunny day and the group split up – the sun worshipers heading for the lovely sandy beach and the rest went for a walk along the sea front. We met back on the Challenger at lunch time and had a “midday feast” which had been kindly provided by Hilary. The afternoon then clouded over slightly so the sun worshippers decided that retail therapy was next on the cards. The rest of the group wanted to see some of the sights of The Hague. We headed off on a tram, not quite sure where we were going and how we were supposed to pay. Luckily several friendly Dutch people helped us and we soon found ourselves in both the shopping area and the historical part of the city. We left the shoppers to spend money to their hearts content and the rest of us went to visit the Dutch parliament buildings, visited the Queen’s working Palace and had a good wander round. Rachel W says that one of her funniest moments was when we asked the palace guard if we could have a photo with him – he kindly obliged as long as we assured him it would not appear on the Internet.

After meeting up with the shoppers who had numerous bags but had not given much thought about how to get them home, we managed to find our way back to the yacht. Once again we went on the massive trek to the showers. We decided that we would eat off the yacht and found a nice restaurant on the quayside. After an enjoyable three course meal we staggered back to the yacht where Davy Jones watch gave out their swaps.

## **Wednesday 3 August/Thursday 4 August 2011**

Our generator alarm woke us up at 7.00. We had breakfast and prepped the yacht for sea and our return voyage to the UK. Those who were worried about joining “green watch” were seen popping plenty of little white pills! There had been concern yesterday that we would have to tow one of the other yachts back as it had engine problems but after a quick trip to Rotterdam by the skipper, all was repaired and we were able to sail independently.

The weather was grey and wet as we left Schevenigan harbour and put up some sails. No sooner were these up than all but the main sail were taken down again as the wind dropped and there was a flat calm. We were once again motor sailing and it was time to practice some knots. After lunch it was the turn of Davy Jones’ watch to go to bed as we re-started our watch system. Most of us decided we could get used to three hours work and then three hours sleep!



The wind gradually filled in and we were soon sailing in a force 4/5. As the night progressed the rain returned and the wind continued to increase becoming a force 6, gusting gale force 8. Changing sails in these winds involved being clipped on, hanging on for dear life and being showered with sea water. Those who were brave enough to helm during the night had the most amazing of experiences as Megan explains



“to helm the yacht in gale force winds was truly exhilarating. It gave me a real buzz and sense of achievement to be able to take control of the wheel in such adverse conditions”. For those asleep below, it was like being on a rollercoaster, one minute you would be up against one side of your bunk and the next find you had been flung to the other. Anything not tied down flew all over the place, particularly on the Jack Sparrow side of the yacht where the storage boxes were not very secure! While at a 45 degree angle normal activities of daily living become a real challenge. Trying to plot the course on the chart table was almost

impossible. Naomi said “when Ellie and I were doing the log while the yacht was on a very large tilt we couldn’t stay on the seat because it was so slippery and fell off around five times. I was almost crying with laughter!”

28 hours and 250 nautical miles later we eventually arrived at Gunwharf Quays in Portsmouth, shattered but totally exhilarated. Steve, the skipper commented on how well the crew had done to cope in the conditions. Usually the yachts would not venture out in gale force 8! His comments certainly helped boost morale as for some this had been particularly challenging. After a well earned lunch, needless to say the sails had to be stowed and the yacht cleaned. Showers were then very welcome. Following showers most of the crew wanted to explore Gunwharfe Quays – a designer outlet paradise and our group of shopaholics returned with even more bags! Jack Sparrow watch gave out their swaps this evening. A fairly early night then followed after the long strenuous sail and the thought of a day sail in the Solent in perfect conditions the following day was most appealing.

### **Friday 5 August 2011**

True to form, the generator sprung into life, this time at 8.00 - a welcome lie in. After breakfast the yacht was prepped for sail and we left the quay at about 9.30 am. Sadly there was less wind than expected so once again sailing was not really an option so we motor sailed around the Solent in glorious sunshine. The permanent crew decided it was time to test our skills and we were challenged with hoisting the storm sail. Jack Sparrow watch won this competition in style. Steve, the skipper prepared a stupendous lunch after which the wind increased and we sailed. We arrived back at Gunwharfe Quay at about 4.00 to the most difficult spot on the pontoon between two other yachts. After a rather hairy episode we were safely alongside, thanks to the skill of Steve, the skipper. Once again it was time to scrub the decks and clean below – this time in readiness for our very special visitor, Gill Slocombe, the Chief Guide.

Gill joined us at about 5.30 pm. She enrolled Katie and presented RYA competent crew certificates to everyone before joining us for our evening meal. It was so nice to be able to meet Gill in such a small, informal setting, she really had time to talk to the girls about the trip, Senior Section, Girlguiding in general and lots of other things. Afterwards Katie said “What a wonderful experience to meet such an inspirational person, I felt very lucky to have this opportunity. This was an experience that I will never forget”. As a result of traffic it had taken Gill 3.5 hours to reach us and she expected it to take her 2.5 hours to get home again but we felt very privileged that she had taken time out from her busy schedule to join us. Gill did say afterwards that “my trip home was great but made all the better for the buzz I got from all of you on the boat!” After Gill left, we went for a drink on the quayside before heading to bed ready for our long journey home.



### **Saturday 6 August 2011**

The generator kicked into life at 7.00. We had to pack, have breakfast and then get all our kit on the pontoon by 8.30. Needless to say in true Guiding fashion our kit was ready to go by 8.00. We cleaned below and are convinced that we had to do an extra scrub of the decks because we were so efficient.



The decks are definitely cleaner for our scrubbing! After presentations of thank you cards, one of our badges and chocolates for the permanent crew, we said our final farewells and left the yacht at 10.00. As our train was not until 12.45, retail therapy was on the cards yet again. We met at 12.00 just as Gunwharfe Quays fired their cannon – this felt like a very fitting end to our trip and with that we collect our bags, headed to the station and caught our train home.

From the feedback I have received and despite the seasickness and hardships, most people on the voyage had an amazing memorable time. They were a fantastic group of Senior Section members who worked well together and were a real credit to Girlguiding NEE. For those of us who were lucky enough to have sailed on the Lord Nelson last year this was an entirely different experience and we have to thank Hilary, our Regional Commissioner, for her enthusiasm in keeping sailing in the region alive and her desire to build on the success of the tall ship experience. Having been fortunate enough to sail on both yachts I have to say I know which my favourite is. The Lord Nelson is stupendous for its grandeur but it would be very difficult to beat the Challenger yacht in terms of speed and exhilaration, particularly in winds touching gale force!

For lots more photos take a look at the photo gallery.

Finally I would like to thank Rebecca Cook and Jan, Sandra and Sally at Region office for all their help behind the scenes with the organisation of the event.

**Rachel Lamond**