

**Yacht 'FLAMINGO'**

**CRUISE LOG**

**SUMMER 2003**

**NORTH WALES & LIVERPOOL**

# CREW

Roger Greene, Skipper

Emma Hurley

Sidney McInerney

Joe Dalton







## Day One – Tuesday 15 July

### Malahide to Holyhead



All four crew arrived at the dock around 08.15 hrs. accompanied by vast amounts of food and baggage which eventually was somehow stored unobtrusively.

We got under way at 08.30 hrs., just 1.5 hours after a spring low water of .58m., and found the channel very shallow in parts. Nevertheless, we exited without touching bottom. Beyond the landfall mark there was a very lumpy swell from the East.

It was a warm close morning with about 7 knots of wind from the NE. We set a course of 101° and motor sailed with just the main up.

By 11.30 hrs. the swell had greatly lessened and the sea had become quite calm in bright sunshine. We noticed a major disturbance on the surface some distance to port and altered course to investigate. An enormous school of dolphins, perhaps as many as seventy, had gathered to corral a shoal of fish, which they had forced to the surface. Some dolphins, obviously replete, came and played around 'Flamingo' and when we resumed our course about ten came along with us for 30 minutes or so. They darted around and under the boat, swam at the bow, jumped clear of the water, sometimes four at a time and generally gave us great entertainment. Lying at the bow, one could almost touch them as they gambolled.

Digital cameras have become extremely popular and there is no doubt that they offer many attractive features. However, they do suffer from one disadvantage in that there is a small but significant time delay between pressing the button and the recording of the image. I had not quite realised the significance of this computing time until I reviewed what I expected to be a series of spectacular shots of jumping dolphins. In almost every case the animal was back in the water and I had a series of shots of splashes!

The sea remained fairly calm in hazy sunshine but the wind increased slightly so we unfurled the jenny and made good progress. About 15.00 hrs., a few hours after the turn of the tide, we encountered a moderate swell, which slowed us slightly. We were obviously close to the ferry track as we saw many ferries and other vessels in the course of the crossing. Because of the haze we did not see Holy Island until we were close in.

By 20.00 hrs. we were tied up in Holyhead Marina and well into our first gin and tonic and by the time Geraldine Dalton's lovely fish pie was hot we had seen off another 'G & T' and opened the wine. A tasty rhubarb tart completed the meal and we adjourned to the nearby Holyhead Sailing Club for a nightcap before turning in for the night.

Miles covered this day	59
Hours at sea	11.25
Engine hours	11.25
Weather	N.E winds, Force 2 –4. Barometer 1017 decreasing to 1014. Fine with fair visibility

## Day Two – Wednesday 16 July

Holyhead



We decided to spend Wednesday in Holyhead as we had missed the favourable tides to go either way around the Anglesey coast. In the sailing club the previous night we had met a character who introduced himself as Roger 'Oppies' and is, apparently, well known to our Broadmeadows parents as the organiser of the visits by the Holyhead juniors to Malahide. He had advised going South about and entering the Menai Straits from the SW end. This rather appealed to me as I had previously been through the Straits in the other direction but, after discussion, we decided to set sail for Conway on the morrow.

The day was very hot and sultry and when the others went on the train to Bangor in the afternoon I stayed on board, performing such diverse tasks as writing up the minutes of Monday night's executive committee minutes on behalf of the absent Hon. Sec., studying sailing directions and devising a passage plan for the voyage to Conway, filling the diesel tanks and doing other odd jobs about the boat.

When the others returned we enjoyed a quick gin and tonic before devouring another of Geraldine's delicious fish lasagnes, without rice on this occasion as it was of such generous proportions. It was washed down with a nice white wine followed by another of Marie McInerney's tasty rhubarb tarts. We had time for just one nightcap in Holyhead S.C. before dashing back on board in a most dramatic thunderstorm. However, the threatened rains did not arrive.



The crew



Dolphins

Miles covered this day	Nil
Hours at sea	Nil
Engine hours	Nil
Weather	Calm. Very hot and sultry



## Day Three – Thursday 17 July

Holyhead to Conway



We cast off at 06.10 hrs. to carry the tide around the NW corner of Anglesey. There was virtually no wind as we motored along in very poor visibility and using GPS for guidance as we could not see the nearby coast. It was raining heavily with lumpy seas but we experienced no problems as we skirted Carmel Head just metres from the rocks, passed Wilma nuclear power station and rounded Point Lynas. The rain cleared and we made very rapid progress with a spring tide under us and a, by now, a lazy swell.

We edged cautiously into Bull Bay where I pointed out some of the features having holidayed there in David's parents-in-law's seaside house. We then went on a little further and found the well-hidden entrance to Amlwch. This old copper exporting harbour in a cleft in the high cliff was once reputed to be the busiest copper exporting port in the U.K. In more recent times it was extended by the construction of concrete 'pens' to accommodate oil exploration and development activities. There is a great tidal range along this coast and it was now almost low water. The tiny harbour was eerie at 9 am in the mist and 'Flamingo' was dwarfed by the towering quay walls and cliffs.

On exiting we joined with two other yachts passaging from Holyhead to Conway. Passing outside Puffin Island at 11.00 hrs. the wind picked up slightly and the mist cleared so we hoisted the main and motor sailed until we picked up the Conway Landfall Buoy with GPS help. The main was stowed again and we had an uneventful trip up the long and winding channel, meeting quite a few other craft entering and leaving, but by 12.30 hrs. 'Flamingo' was securely moored up in a tight berth. The open sea approach is very narrow in parts and requires concentration to stay in the channel and negotiate the markers in the correct sequence. It is exposed to westerlies and we considered it could be quite nasty in a blow. On entering the Conway River there is an extremely strong current and one could easily be swept past the marina entrance. The marina is tidal and entry is over a sill which is raised some hours either side of the tide to maintain a minimum depth inside.

In the early 1990's a road tunnel was constructed under the Conway River using very large concrete tubes, which were cast in a specially excavated enormous hole on the river bank and then floated out and sunk in a dredged trench in the river bed. On completion of the works the hole was purchased and, with some additional work, converted into a marina. There are in excess of 1,000 craft moored at Conway with about half in the marina and the rest further upstream on a variety of river pontoons, pile and buoy moorings and mud berths.

We walked into the quaint old town of Conway, dominated by the great castle and Telford's rail bridge. After exploring one or two alehouses we returned by a very

attractive riverside path and spotted another Kelt on an off shore pontoon. We again dined aboard on Claire Greene's curry accompanied by boiled rice.

We had taken with us a number of home cooked and deep frozen meals, which were well wrapped in newspaper for insulation and then stored in the ship's coolbox.

I bought a flare pack in the marina chandlery. The on-board flares had gone out of date last year and the Conway price seemed very keen.



Amlwch Harbour



Conway Estuary

Miles covered this day	36
Hours at sea	6.5
Engine hours	6.5
Weather	Wind cyclonic at first, N.E. Force 1-2 later. Rain and fog cleared later to hot and sunny Barometer steady at 1008.



During my working life I was a frequent commuter to the head office of Royal Insurance by the Merseyside waterfront. I had seen the city go into deep depression as local industry closed down and the vast docks went into major decline. In the last decade there has been some re-juvenation and large investment in leisure along the waterfront. Having so often sailed up the Mersey on B & I boats, flown into Speke with various airlines and crossed to Birkenhead on the ferry I had a hankering to make a nostalgic return and sail up the river in my own boat.

So, on Friday morning we were up at 04.45 hrs. and leaving Conway Marina just before the sill was due to be raised at 05.30 hrs. The morning was bright but windy. We were unable to get a radio weather forecast last night or this morning although we could hear the coastguard directing a search for a missing diver at Maolfre on the NE coast of Anglesey. On exiting the marina we were just three hours after high water and when we left the shelter of the river and turned in to the channel we met a nasty wind over tide and current condition with 27 knots of wind from the West. We needed all of 'Flamingo's' 18 hp to get us through the long buoyed channel to the open sea. Emma had left the fore hatch slightly open and as a consequence got her bedding and some effects wet.

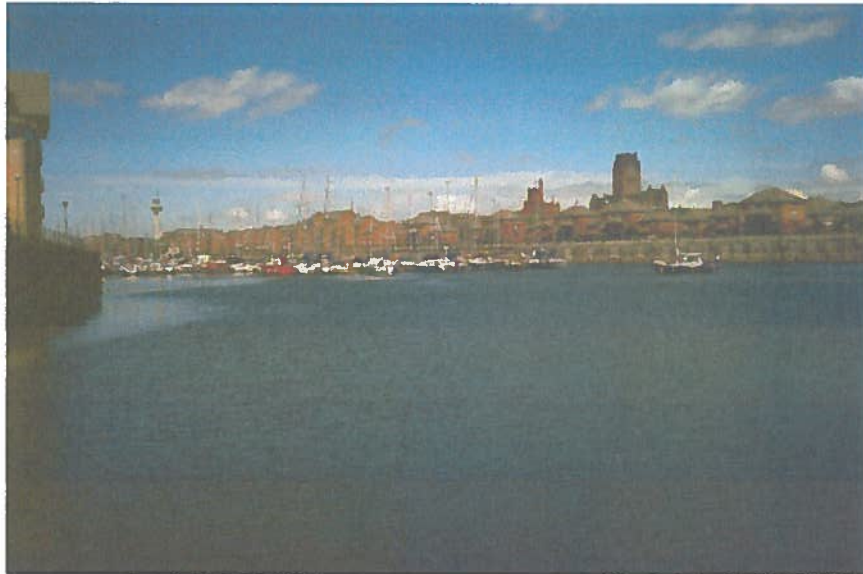
It was with some relief that we turned about 140° at the landfall buoy and set a course to round Great Ormes Head. We bowled along in a following moderate sea on full jenny only, later furling slightly to give an easier ride. The morning remained bright and though the sea state and wind gradually reduced we continued to make rapid progress. We passed close to an offshore oilfield, several large ships anchored and others coming and going to Liverpool. On picking up the Liverpool Channel One Buoy we endeavoured to raise the port control, as advised in the sailing directions, but without success. The 15 mile journey up the wide and well-marked Mersey channel was very unpleasant with confused roly seas and overspills. Immediately outside the channel revetments on the SW side the seas were truly nasty with waves jumping all over and lots of white tops. We met little traffic, probably because it was only about half tide and the channel is too shallow at that stage for large vessels.

The marina is well upstream past Pierhead and we arrived off the lock-gate entrance about 14.00 hrs. and just after opening time. After a wait outside of about 15 minutes while some boats locked out the lights went to green and we motored in to the lock chamber and tied up. The lock filled very rapidly but comfortably and we were soon following directions to our allotted berth at the head of the first dock and immediately below the Liverpool Marina Bar and Restaurant.

By now it was scorching hot so we sat in the shade outside the pub for a pint and sun-dried tomato and goats cheese on ciabata bread. Emma put her wet clothing out to dry whilst Sidney worked on improving the radio performance, as it was totally unacceptable to day. Joe met a friend of his daughters by arrangement. There was a wedding reception in the restaurant that night so we ate in the bar in the evening. The marina is large and extends over two connecting docks with the berths in the inner



dock not being fully serviced. New apartment blocks and town house developments surround the dock. Beyond that there are further connected docks given over to rowing, windsurfing and canoeing. The latter has a permanent slalom course and two canoe polo areas. Despite the considerable developments around the docks the streets outside were lifeless with no shops or dwellings but only lock-ups and workshops.



Liverpool Marina with Anglican cathedral on skyline



Mersey waterfront at Pierhead, Liverpool

Miles covered this day	46
Hours at sea	9
Engine hours	6
Weather	Overcast and breezy in the morning but very hot, sticky and calm in the afternoon. Barometer steady at 1020 hp.

## Day Five – Saturday 19 July

Liverpool



Today, Saturday, was to be a rest day with time to explore the Mersey waterfront. We walked to the Albert Dock and spent some time in the magnificent maritime museum housed in part of the old docks warehouse complex. We lunched in an attractive colonnade café opposite the Tate Gallery also in a converted warehouse. These great four-storey Victorian buildings were designed to be as fireproof as possible and no wood or other flammable material was used in their construction. Ships were brought via locks to the extensive docks where they could lie alongside the warehouses and where goods could be transferred directly from one to the other.

Her Majesty's Customs & Excise also have a very interesting museum in one of these warehouses, which we also visited. The others walked into Liverpool city centre whilst I made my way back to the boat to plan for the morrow. The local area forecast was predicting force 3-4 Southerlies but the Irish Sea outlook was for South to SE force 3-4 but increasing 5-6. I was undecided until late in the evening about departing but finally decided we should be up and ready to exit the lock before the final transits at 05.45 hrs. We dined well in the marina bar before turning in.



We dined well



and carried out radio aerial repairs

Miles covered this day	Nil
Hours at sea	Nil
Engine hours	Nil
Weather	Warm and calm.

## Day Six – Sunday 20 July

### Liverpool to Beaumaris



We were all up at 5 am and followed two other boats out through the fast and efficient lock system. The morning was bright and sunny with a Southerly force 3. In contrast to our arrival, the Mersey was calm. We checked with Mersey Radio re shipping movements and gave a TR to Liverpool Coastguard. We met two large cargo ferries before passing the Liver Building. Emma was on the helm whilst Sidney was doing the navigation.

The boats ahead did not follow the main channel but took a short cut to the West to use the Rock Channel. The chart showed this to be very shallow and the sailing directions cautioned against using it without local knowledge. As the tide was ebbing we decided, following discussion, to stick to the main channel though it would add many miles to our journey. The main was hoisted with a single reef and the jenny rolled out. By 08.30 hrs. our course and the channel was taking 'Flamingo' on to a close reach in a force 5/6 Southerly with a bouncy sea. To make sailing more pleasant and as we were in no hurry we rolled in some of the foresail but were still making in excess of 7 knots over the ground assisted by the tide. We were sailing with oil fields on each side of us though we did not pass close to either.

Around 10.30 hrs. the wind eased and veered Westerly and the sea state went to calm. It was warm but overcast but soon the sun came out, the wind dropped and the sea became flat calm and it was shorts and tee shirts – for a short while. Rain threatened and it became misty. Approaching Puffin Island the wind returned about Force 3 on the nose and the sea began to get up but the sun came out again. We rounded Puffin to the West to enter the Menai Straits and as we passed between the lighthouse and Perch Rock beacon we were hit by a sudden vicious but short-lived squall. The wind remained fresh on the nose as we motored towards Beaumaris.

By 14.00 hrs. we were searching for a vacant mooring among the many boats moored on the West or Anglesey shore at Beaumaris and the wind was fresh and squally. We spotted several free moorings and though well off from the shore the boats around were small. Close by Gallows Point we identified a vacant mooring out at the edge of the trots and were assured by some young people on a nearby mooring that it was in order to pick it up for an overnight stay. Another vicious squall arrived and we were force to stand of 'till it passed. I anticipated some difficulty in picking up the mooring because of the fresh wind, strong tide and congested conditions. After several exploratory approaches I made my attempt and Sidney and Emma got us secured promptly. We were only a few hundred metres off the beach and could read the telephone number on the North West Venturers Yacht Club. We phoned and called by radio but got no reply despite the fact there were lots pottering about. The club publishes the Sailing Directions for Anglesey and Joe called a David Jones whose number was in the book. He confirmed we were very welcome to stay overnight on BMS 116. No sooner had he done so than the young folk we had consulted earlier motored off their mooring and shortly after a workboat was tied to it for the night.

We passed the afternoon observing the Sunday action about us and as the tide dropped we saw the mud banks getting ever closer to us and most of the boats taking the ground. Although we had a few metres under us we could almost have jumped on to



the low water shore. Sidney, Emma and Joe spent much time calculating and planning the timing for our passage through the Swellies next morning and eventually more or less agreed ! A couple of 'G & T's' later (the gin was running low) and we were unconcerned with the high winds and very heavy squally showers outside and the forecast of strong Westerlies for the next few days. Emma was cook and her tasty pasta dish was washed down with a few bottles of Rawson's Retreat and all had a great nights rest.



Gallows Point at Beaumaris



Britannia Bridge after passing through 'The Swellies'

Miles covered this day	51
Hours at sea	9
Engine hours	9
Weather	Light southerly at first, then calm then veering to fresh squally Westerly. Fine in early morning, then bright and sunny but heavy rain late in the day. Barometer 1017 falling slowly to 1015.

## Day Seven – Monday 21 July

Beaumaris to Caernarfon



Today we were up late after a great night's sleep. The morning was bright but the wind was gusting over 20 knots. Milk supplies were low and going off after yesterdays long bouncy trip. I topped up the diesel tank from the reserve supply. Our destination was the small Victoria Dock in Caernarfon but we could not raise the dock master by radio or phone to check if there was room for us. However, he was kind enough call back later in the morning and offer a berth rafted outside some other vessels. He also advised entering the Swellies about 40 minutes before slack water at the top of the tide which was about 1 hour earlier than Sidney, Emma and Joe, working independently, had calculated. So, at 13.45 hrs we cast off in a force 6/7 to motor the 3.5 miles from Gallows Point to the Menai Bridge. We arrived about 15 minutes early. At 35 minutes before slack we made our entry under the bridge. We were stemming a strong flow and so has plenty of time to take in the sights. A motorboat had gone through about 10 minutes ahead of us but otherwise we were alone. Navigation was not particularly difficult though the swirling currents did push the boat about a bit. Shortly after exiting the Swellies we met two large, modern mussel boats going the other way and were very glad we had not encountered them in the narrows. To really appreciate how awesome the Swellies can be one should look down from the Menai Bridge at half tide. The passage looks really scary.

We got to Port Dinoric before the tide started to run in our favour but the very strong wind over tide from there to Caernarfon slowed our speed through the water to about 2 knots and Emma, on the helm, got soaked by the spray from the bow. The rest of the crew, gentlemen to a man, were either below or sheltering under the canopy. The dock master was not in his office when we arrived. Though the entrance light was showing green I was reluctant to attempt an entry to the small and apparently tight marina behind high walls without his instructions. The dockmaster showed up shortly after and directed us in and to a berth rafted outside a similar sized boat to ours. He took our lines and was generally a most helpful young chap. One of the yachts that had taken the inshore shortcut out of the Mersey was moored just ahead of 'Flamingo'

We dined well that night in 'The Black Boy' a pub built in 1522 and renovated in 1954. Afterwards we visited the nearby Caernarfon Sailing Club for a nightcap on the way back to the boat and noticed that 'Isha' (Sean & Denise Doyle) has signed the visitors book last year.

Miles covered this day	11
Hours at sea	3
Engine hours	3
Weather	Bright but overcast later. Blustery force 6/7 funnelling up the Straits against us.

Day Eight – Tuesday 22 July

Caernarfon



Today was bright and warm despite an overcast sky. As we planned to stay in port we went to work on the bow and masthead lights which had been giving trouble. Emma made a successful ascent to the masthead to fix the latter.

The exit from the South Western end of the Menai Straits is very narrow and leads out to a long winding channel through shallow sandbanks. It can be very nasty in South Westerlies. The forecasts were mixed but generally not encouraging. I consulted with neighbouring boats but was little the wiser afterwards so I postponed a decision until the morning.

In the afternoon we walked the quays and toured the fine castle of Edward II. After an aperitif (or two) on board we ate in Stones Bistro where my stroganoff was delicious.

We then called to the Royal Welsh Y.C. The club, which dates from 1847, is in the old Watergate in the town walls. It is full of character with a narrow winding stairs to a large flat roof with great views over the Straits. A terrace at a lower level has seven old cannon which are still used for race starts. To gain entry to the club one presses a button at heavy gothic doorway at street level. This opens onto a stairs where at the top of which the club steward met us with a warm greeting. He presented a copy of the club yearbook and asked the skipper to sign all in. Later a member, a former commodore and retired high court judge, gave us almost enthusiastic tour including a second winter or snug bar that had a complete collection of Yachting Magazine. The club Patron is the Duke of Edinburgh and the Earl of Snowden is Honorary Commodore. A large oil painting of the Duke of Anglesey hangs in the bar. The place is redolent with tradition and history but in no way at all stuffy as evidenced by the truly exceptional welcome extended.



Entrance door to Royal Welsh Y.C.



Royal Welsh Y.C. from the waterfront

Miles covered this day	Nil
Hours at sea	Nil
Engine hours	Nil
Weather	Warm but overcast



Day Nine – Wednesday 23 July

Caernarfon



The weather was not good this morning and the forecast was for strong Westerlies. This would possibly make for a rough exit to the Irish Sea and if the wind veered at all the sail home would be long and uncomfortable so I decided to stay in port.

Unfortunately Emma had a wedding on Friday and so she left by bus around mid-day to catch the HSS from Holyhead. The rest of us passed a lazy day exploring the town further.

We dined in the town and on returning to the boat I got a forecast of moderate to fresh West to South Westerlies so decided to make for Malahide on the morrow. We retired early in anticipation of another early departure as soon as the lock sill was lowered.



Caernarfon Castle

Miles covered this day	Nil
Hours at sea	Nil
Engine hours	Nil
Weather	Warm but overcast

## Day Ten – Thursday 24 July

Caernarfon to Malahide



This morning there was a fresh Westerly but the forecast was for it to back Southerly and so we decided to go and we cleared the Victoria Dock as soon as there was enough water over the sill about 07.15 hrs. The passage through the narrows was smooth and the outer channel was also fine though long and twisty but fairly well marked. Out to sea there was a swell with bouncy waves but we made good progress under full main and reefed jib. The weather was cloudy but bright and we saw little traffic. Around 15.30 hrs. the wind increased and went into the South force 5/6 producing a following sea, which later came onto the beam. I called for a single reef in the main and rolled in some more jenny. Howth was sighted about 17.00 hrs. and we were at the Malahide Landfall Buoy by 19.25 hrs. where we met the home fleet going out to race.

### Summary

All in all a very enjoyable and leisurely cruise despite the frequent very early morning starts. We all got along very well together with good food and ample alcohol. The weather was very mixed with extreme heat on arrival in Liverpool. The winds were either very light or quite fresh and often more or less on the nose. As a consequence we motor sailed or motored much of the trip.

The sailing waters of North Wales are pleasant and within easy reach of Malahide and one can normally expect a reach over and back. Most of the marinas are reasonably priced except for Conway which charges double the going rate though I did qualify for a 50% discount as an annual berth holder in another Crest Nicholson managed marina.

The lock-keepers were generally most helpful with advice on best departure times, local sailing tips, etc. and the welcome at the Royal Welsh Yacht Club was quite exceptional.

Miles covered this day	67
Hours at sea	12
Engine hours	1
Weather	Warm and cloudy but bright. Barometer rose early from 1018 to 1019 but then fell steadily during the rest of the day to 1015 hp.