

Day 1 - Arrival

My voyage on John Laing had become sort of, a myth. It was creeping up but never quite fast enough, and when I looked at the calendar, it was still quite a long way off. Suddenly it was there, within two days, and I still wasn't packed. How did it do that?

Kryisia, my friend from school arrived (she and I were travelling together) and we arrived at Ipswich marina early. The next half hour involved Kryisia looking at her watch every five minutes, changing our countdown to exactly two o'clock. When our boarding time actually arrived, I was jumping up and down with the thought of setting sail.

When we arrived and had said goodbye to our parents, we sat in the cockpit and talked. The skipper introduced the sea staff, and tried to get us playing a game, which failed miserably.

We were finally ready to go, and I think I almost burst with anticipation. To be honest, it

wasn't all that exciting, but to a first-timer like me, everything was new, so I didn't know what to expect.

We arrived in Harwich a couple of hours later, and walked around it as a big group. There was one shop and no locals; maybe Harwich is a ghost town.

Day 2 – First time on pretty much everything

That night we didn't sleep all that much, since Ashley can't contain himself when surrounded by people, it seems. My watch were hurled up on deck, even before breakfast – a sin in my book!

The crew functioned like a well-oiled machine, but Megan and I got on especially well.

The beds are not what you would call private. They are more like padded shelves, with the same amount of headroom. Luckily, I didn't hit my head on the bed above me all that much, but when I did, good grief did it hurt!

A little while later, our watch was summoned up on deck to do winch drills. After a few times they are quite enjoyable, but the first time they are ruddy terrifying!

I had to practice kleaning-on and letting-fly, but the first time it nearly took my fingers off.

Helming is a tricky business. You have to steer hard enough to turn the boat, but not too much as to swing her round. I never really got the knack.

Earlier that summer, I had been to France, and had marvelled at how blue and beautiful the ocean is. At home, the water may be green, but it is still pretty. For a while, I sat on deck, just admiring the water. It is as though a giant has knapped the surface, but it is always moving, like liquid flint. The cool wind on your face is just the tip of the iceberg; there are a whole whirl of things I can't describe.

Day 3 – part I: The Night Watch

We were woken up at the *very* antisocial hour of 0100 that morning, to do our night watch shift. As we stumbled up on deck, blinking and rubbing our eyes, the other watch trooped downstairs, murmuring something about bunks, tea and the green flashing buoy on the port bow.

It was bitterly cold and I was really glad I had the oilskins on. Unfortunately, there was no wind, so the low grumble of the engine cut through any tired thoughts.

Helming at night is an amazing experience, because you rely on the other crew to be your eyes and ears. The only reference points you have are the numbers on a compass, (why do they only put two digits on a compass, not three?) and whatever buoy Krysia could point out to me.

That night I discovered one very important thing: I like tea. When your fingers and toes are numb with cold, and your oilskins feel like metal plates welded to the cockpit, there's nothing like

hot, sweet tea. Even so, it took about four mugs to get us through the night watch,

At five am, after four hours of night watch, we pretty much fell down the companionway steps, and plonked our weary bodies on the bunks. There were no last-minute toilet breaks, nothing. We slept.

Part II: Yellow Buckets

The first thing I knew of the rough weather was nearly being thrown off my bunk – I had neglected to put the lee-cloth up four hours earlier.

I started to change my clothes and get into my oilskins, but as I did this, I could sense the dreaded feeling creeping up my gut: seasickness. It steadily grew worse as I attempted to sit and eat breakfast. After taking two mouthfuls of cereal, I knew there was no choice. I got up and muttered weakly “gangway!”

On hearing this, the sea staff set about clearing the companionway steps for me. (*In case*

you're wondering, "gangway" is the codeword for "get out my way, I'm gonna puke!")

I raced up on deck, and a yellow bucket was thrust into my hands. As it turned out, I wasn't the only one had a yellow bucket. Mac sat on the other side of the cockpit, looking quite green.

For the next four hours, I sat on the floor of the cockpit, alternately puking and watching other people puke.

A couple of times, Brendan, with a look of great distaste on his face, would swill the buckets round and chuck the...stuff...overboard.

Eventually, I felt better enough to eat some bread-and-butter, and then some chicken stew.

Later that afternoon we arrived in Cowes, on the Isle of Wight. We had been attempting to get to Poole, but with no luck. Before we were allowed off the *John Lain*, we had happy hour, so Krysia and I were assigned to the galley. We washed up a **lot** of stuff: all eighteen bowls, billions of cutlery items and several large saucepans. Eventually, we

were finished, and since I was cooking that evening, I got to go and shower.

After two days at sea, we had decided that anything vaguely clean was a luxury, and so being the first to shower was a huge privilege.

Once dinner had been cooked and eaten, I fell asleep on Megan's shoulder. I suppose it wasn't really asleep, because I could hear everyone talking, but it sounded like they were at the end of a tunnel.

I heard Joe say something about needing to get to his seat, in the middle of the saloon, but the only way for him to get there was to climb over our laps.

Suddenly, I got some dust up my nose and started spluttering. This could not have come at a more inopportune moment, as his bum was hovering just above head height.

Through giggles, I heard Megan say "don't look up!"

I didn't dare.

A bit later on, everyone was forced to help with the washing up, and I was moved round to the other side of the table along with Joe. At the head of the table were the two Welshmen (not really, but the accent was funny) and everyone else was spread around the table and given a tea towel.

Joe allowed me to lean on his shoulder and doze while he did the drying up. It was all very nice but sadly, not to last.

I was rushed into the galley and told to put things away (the years at sea had made them hard, hard men!).

Eventually, everything was finished and we were allowed to go to bed.

Day 4 –Suicide swimmers

The next morning we cast off from Cowes, refreshed and *cleanish*. The sunshine was absolutely gorgeous, warming us and lifting our spirits.

Now I am not kidding when I say the sea, unlike normal, was blue. It is never blue around the UK, always greeny-grey, so it was a lovely surprise.

For lunch (or you could say three o'clocks) we stopped in Osborne Bay, a beautiful little cove tucked out of sight. We anchored and the lunch was put on. (The oven kept turning off, so the jacket potatoes took even longer than usual). There were about twenty other yachts anchored in the bay, and all looked like they were having a picnic of some sort.

It looked like people were swimming in the water.

“Shouldn’t swim there” Wolf and Simon muttered to each other “they’ll get carried away!”

Sure enough, the current dragged the three heads back, away from the boat. The sea staff on *John Laing* started preparing the dinghy, because “they were under legal obligation to help vessels and persons in distress” (*say this with a snooty accent*).

The yacht that they had jumped off turned around quickly and picked them up; I think everyone in the bay breathed a sigh of relief.

Then, the swimmers did it again. And again. We concluded that it was Man Over Board practice.

During that week, the heads got blocked up; twice. In our watches we were sent down to do “Potty Training”. We all had to show that we could flush the loo, and we all did, except for Ashley, who refused – I think we know who blocked them.

Later, Simon called a conference around the saloon.

“As you know, yesterday we tried to get to Poole, but we had too much wind and had to pull in early at Cowes. Today, we also tried to get to

Poole, but we have no wind, so we are heading for Gosport instead.”

A cheer went up from Ashley and Mac, the two chavs actually from Gosport.

By now, the two “Welshmen” were just taking the whole joke in their stride, and had been banging on about sheep, Wales and Welsh things in general all day.

Simon asked us where we wanted to go the next day.

“Poole.”

“Poole.”

“Wales.”

“Wales.”

“Poole.”

“Poole.”

“Poole.”

“Poole.”

“Poole.”

“France!” (This was Ashley. He was still convinced we were going to France.)

“Poole.”

Grinning, Simon drew out one of his many charts. (I think he has an unhealthy obsession with them.)

“Here” he said, pointing, “is where we are now. Here are the showers that you used this evening. Ok?”

We all nodded. Feeling clean is a lovely thing.

“And here is (inverted commas) ‘Wales!’”

He was pointing at Poole Harbour, where he now drew a ‘Welsh’ border, and crossed out all mentions of Poole, writing WALES instead.

“So tomorrow, we are headed for ‘Wales!’”

Day 5 – Part I: Meet BOB

The next morning we set out for ‘Wales’. We sat on deck, supposedly watching out for boats, actually working on knots and just generally having a good time.

There was more wind that day, so we were going quite fast. We were all looking forward to going to ‘Wales’; I think it had sort of become the ultimate goal.

That day was Floyd’s birthday, so we were all very excited and found it hard to concentrate on the job in hand.

We were sailing past Bournemouth, trying to gybe and actually getting quite good at it. There were several winches, which required tailing, grinding and letting-fly, so we all had something to do.

We had just finished a manoeuvre, when the Red Arrows appeared. The stunt planes had obviously been commissioned for a show above Bournemouth. They flew around and around, in the

most daring stunts. We told Floyd that it was his birthday present from us, and pointed out the letters L Y O F D – admittedly in the wrong order, but who’s to say the Red Arrows can spell?

The show went on for about an hour, and all talk of gybes was forgotten.

Later, the skipper summoned us up on deck, to talk about Man Over Board.

They went through the procedures of recovering a MOB and then produced, from somewhere in the bowels of the yacht, BOB.

He was a smallish orange buoy, with a face on one side and “Help Me!” on the other. They tied it to a yellow bucket – I began to feel sorry for it – and chucked it over board. We all leapt to attention and began shouting “Man Over Board!” and pointing at the rapidly receding red blob. The boat turned around slowly, and Brendan clambered into his uncomfortable-looking harness.

The boat came up to BOB, and Brendan was lowered over the side of the yacht.

A look of horror flashed across his face, as his bum just went into the water. Fortunately for him, (unfortunately for us, the spectators) he didn’t need to go any further, and picked up the buoy easily.

Once BOB was hefted up on deck, David and Joe gave him a right kicking.

“How dare you go and worry us all to death like that!” bellowed Joe, grinning at David.

“You good-for-nothing, freaking toad!” David growled, grinning back.

All the crew were sent down below deck for a while, as the sea staff needed to practice MOB.

A while later they came downstairs, Brendan muttering darkly to himself.

“How many times did they make you go overboard?” we asked tentatively, ready to go scuttling back if he turned nasty.

“Four times! I’m all cold and wet!” he replied miserably. We laughed.

Later, amid cheers and groans, we arrived in ‘Wales’!

Mac and I, helped by Michaela, were told to cook the evening's dinner. Mac is a really good cook, and surprisingly nice when he's not being egged on by Ashley.

It was a chicken and pesto dish with pasta, and it is heaven after a hard day's sailing. That evening I helped with the washing up, and our side of the table won.

Part II: "Honey, do you love me?"

Instead of going straight to bed that evening, we were allowed to play games around the saloon. We started with "Honey, do you love me?"

It involves one person saying to another "Honey, do you love me?"

The correct response is "Honey, you know I love you, but I just can't say it without a smile on my face!"

This may not sound all that hard, but you have to keep a straight face throughout. First person to laugh is out.

I had a tactic that worked for a while: not looking at Joe's face.

I passed the first round. On the second round, however, it didn't work because I was told that I had to look at his face. Inevitably, I laughed and lost.

By this time, most of us were out.

Joe tried to get Andy out, but he was finding it hard to keep a straight face. His eyebrow and lip twitched like frightened slugs as he tried to contain his laugh. Unfortunately, he couldn't hold it any longer, and got out.

By the time it got round the table, only Wolf and Simon were left in. They obviously had a lot of practice; they were holding hands, looking deep into each other's eyes and whispering into each other's ears – it was a very touching scene. As we had no hope of deciding the better not-smiler, they were announced joint winners.

After that, we played "Pass the Clap". This game involves putting your hands on the table, and then crossing your arms with your neighbour's, so

the hands in front of you are not your own. Then one person would slap the table, and you had to pass it around the table.

At first, we were all very slow and couldn't work out whose arm was who's. Gradually, we sped up and introduced the "Double Clap". This sends the clap in the other direction, so we had lots of *fun*. If you hesitated or went when you weren't supposed to, that hand was out. We were all out quite quickly, and I think Viki won.

By this time it was half past twelve, and absolutely shattered. We all went to bed and attempted sleep, which was nearly impossible, because Ashley and Mac were having farting competitions – not nice!

Day 6 – Part I: Wales

The next morning we were woken up to clean the boat. For those who haven't done this before, it usually involves several hours of torture.

We had to clean the deck, the saloon, galley, and heads, reef all the sails and stow various lines. It took a *very* long time.

But, gradually the boat was tidied up and we were given two choices: a) shower or b) go shopping. After spending three solid days getting to 'Wales', we weren't going to use our time to shower.

Unfortunately, Megan, Krysia, Mac, Ashley and I – because we were under 15, so the staff said – had to be chaperoned. Us girls, however, knew that only Ashley and Mac needed escorting. They had trusted us before, why not now?

Annoyed, we tailed the other group, which had Luke, David, Floyd, Joe, Mat and Viki. We stopped in a few shops, and waited outside the ones that Ashley and Mac went into.

After complaining **a lot**, Andy, who was chaperoning us, let Megan, Krysia and I go off on our own, provided that we met up ten minutes later. We did this the first time, but the second time we went off, we couldn't find Andy. So saying, we walked off with the other group, as opposed to wandering off on our own. (Sensible, was it not?)

When we got back to the boat, Andy told us that we had annoyed him, but no punishment was given, so no more was said.

The others, however, had had a whale of a time. Apparently, Floyd had asked a man running a temporary tattoo stall, for a tattoo on his left bum cheek. Outraged, the man had leapt at Floyd, and our ginger-haired friend only just got away without a beating. I can just imagine Floyd doing that. He has an innocent manner, which makes him seem a lot younger than he is; it is hilarious.

Viki bought some tubes of hair dye, so we all had pink and blue streaks in our hair for a few hours.

Part II: Up the Solent

For about half an hour, we had “crew training”, “Customs” with Michaela and “Meteorology” with Joe.

After this, *John Laing* set off for Southampton.

I suppose we must have set off about midday, and sailed until half ten that night.

We cruised past The Needles for the second time that week, and they were even more beautiful, with the sun glinting on the water, like shards of crystal. I was allowed to helm while we sailed around them, and it was very tempting to look at them, but we didn't want to end up on the shingles, so I didn't.

We had quite a bit of wind that afternoon, so the vessel travelled relatively fast, compared to the rest of the voyage.

When I wasn't helming, I was practising knots with Joe and Megan, and I finally mastered the rolling hitch (go me!).

We sailed on and on. As it got darker we had to have more lookouts, because we had to look for the entrance to the channel. This was marked by various coloured flashing buoys, which each flash different amounts in ten seconds. It is confusing, to say the least.

At one point, Simon ran a little workshop on navigation, which involved looking at and drawing on charts.

Suddenly, someone spotted the correct buoy, and we surged up the Southampton Channel. As the *John Laing* drew closer to the harbour, we passed an odd structure.

It was like a huge pontoon, about ten feet off the surface of the water, in the middle of the harbour entrance.

As I looked, I saw that it was covered in gulls of some sort. Vast numbers of them swarmed all over the slimy wood, like huge ghostly flies on a carcass. It was quite disturbing.

Eventually we drew up outside the harbour Master's office, because it was too dark to find a spot in harbour.

After several false tries, Simon manoeuvred us into a space he was happy with. Krysia and I were assigned to tying the bow spring, which involved Andy throwing a rope back to us, from the pontoon.

He needed several attempts to get it right. The first time he threw the line far too short. His second shot sent the rope over the staysail boom and into the murky water on the other side.

Eventually, we were alongside and secure. Everyone, including the sea staff, was exhausted, so we all went to bed and slept like logs.

Day 7 - Our Last

The next morning, everyone was ecstatic; we could go home and have a bath! But we weren't given a chance to daydream about hot, running water.

For the next three and a half hours, we had to clean *John Laing* until she sparkled.

The deck had to be hosed, ropes recoiled, all stock checked, bags packed, heads cleaned – incidentally, I never had to clean the heads the whole time I was there. I suppose that made Krysia and I the lucky ones! – Fenders put away, sails covered, the galley washed including the floor and ceiling; everywhere we had been in the last seven days had to be spotless.

By the time we had finished, my knees hurt, my jeans were filthy, and I never wanted to see another sail cover *ever* again.

We all gathered around the saloon, and the skipper gave us his “I'm very proud of all of you” speech. We were given certificates, logbooks for

the people who had bought them, and a round of applause. After that we had to say our best memory, our worst memory, and the most lasting memory. I decided that my worst was definitely being sick, and my most lasting memory was everyone I had met, but my best memory was Playing Skipper.

This had happened earlier in the week. Megan swapped roles with Wolf, so becoming Skipper, and I swapped roles with Simon, so I got to be First Mate.

Megan and I directed those two to do the most menial jobs, so Wolf had a temper tantrum.

After that, I ran around collecting staff signatures, email addresses, and posing in photos

Finally, Krysia's dad picked Krysia and I up, to drive us home.

After word

What did the voyage give me? I suppose that's quite hard to say, considering what we achieved over the week.

You could say that I gained new skills, or gave me an unforgettable experience. I have discovered a newfound sense of confidence in myself, and it has changed my perspective on the world. Now I see things through a brighter spectrum, and I can say "At least you've had a shower today!" or "Your bedroom is luxurious; there are not ten other people in it!"

Despite all the hardships of the week, I enjoyed it immensely, and took away much more than I brought.

Thankyou so much, Ocean Youth Trust South, for an amazing week.

Who's Who?

Seastaff:

Wolf (Mark) – Skipper

Simon – First Mate

Brendan - Bosun

Andy – Watchleader

Joe – Watchleader

Michaela – Watchleader

Crew:

Kizzie Bridgman (Me)

Kryisia

Megan

Viki

Joe

David

Ashley

Mac

Luke

Matt

Floyd

Boaty terms

Bow – front of the boat

Stern – back of the boat

Port – left, when looking at the bow

Starboard – right, when looking at the bow

Sheets – ropes attached to sails

Lines – ropes used for mooring

Reefing – folding sails OR making sails

smaller whilst sailing

Galley – kitchen

Saloon – living area, with table

Bunks – beds (obviously)

Lee-cloth – cloth attached to the side of your bunk, which can be tied up to prevent you falling out while at sea.

Heads – toilets (always flush them, or everyone is in trouble!)

Fenders – buoys that are hung over the side while mooring up, to prevent the boat from being bashed

Mainsail – biggest sail, middle of the boat

Staysail – front of boat

Mizzen sail – back of boat

Jib or Headsail – smallest sail, very front of boat

Boom – horizontal beam that holds the bottom of a sail

Charts – maps, when you are on a boat

Helm – the steering wheel in the stern

Yellow Buckets – the only buckets you are allowed to be sick in

Rolling Hitch – a knot which I found particularly difficult

Did you know?

A Union Flag can only be called a Union Jack when it is on a boat.

What and Where

Date – 17/08/09 – 24/08/09

Vessel – John Laing

Ports of Call - Ipswich, Harwich, Cowes,
Gosport, Poole, and Southampton

Maximum Wind Speed – Force 7

Total Distance Sailed – 318 miles

Certificate Gained – Competent Crew
(RYA)

Kizzie Bridgman

Age – 13