

My voyage aboard the John Laing

My name is Rosemary Chamberlain and I am fourteen years old. In May 2009, I went on a four night voyage aboard the John Laing. I was diagnosed with scoliosis (curvature of the spine) in October 2007 and am currently wearing a back brace. It was really because of my scoliosis that I first learnt about the John Laing voyages as I read Seonaid Strachan's account of her voyage in the Scoliosis Association UK magazine. After reading her account I really wanted to try a voyage out for myself. After a lot of e-mails backwards and forwards, we finally found me a space on a voyage just a week before it was due to start. (Due to the not exactly advanced warning the weekend was turned into a slightly manic rush to get everything ready and packed!)

When I arrived on the John Laing on Monday 25th May, I met all the staff and the other crew-members. Most of us had come on the voyage without knowing anybody else, but we quickly got to know each other and soon we were all getting on really well. We were all allocated our waterproofs, life-jackets and bunks before our first safety briefing. I had an interesting time trying to get some waterproofs to fit... my jacket almost reached my knees and the size of the trousers resulted in a joke that lasted for most of the mealtimes on the trip... "You need to eat more, or your trousers will never fit!" (The small waterproof jackets and trousers seemed to be in short supply!)

After the safety briefings and an introduction to life above and below deck we motored out of Southampton and started to sail to Cowes. Right from the beginning we were involved in sailing the boat even though most of us were either complete beginners or had sailed only much smaller dinghies before! Everyday, after breakfast and before we started the day's sailing, we had 'happy hour'. This (as we had explained to us many times!), was a 'happy' time for the boat, not necessarily for us! During this 'happy hour' we split into our watches, with one watch cleaning above decks and one cleaning below. Over the three main days of the voyage, we sailed to Yarmouth and Portsmouth, revisited Cowes and then returned to Southampton. On the night we spent in Yarmouth we went rowing in the harbour, this was also a new experience for many of us and at first resulted in the dinghy spinning round in circles and not going anywhere in particular! However by the end, most of us had improved our technique and were able to row in a vaguely straight(ish!) line!

On the last day of the trip, after spending the night moored at Southampton, we cleaned the ship from top to bottom to make sure that the John Laing was ready for the next voyage that was starting that afternoon. Then, after this extended happy 'hour' we were presented with our certificates. I was presented with my Start Yachting Certificate along with nine other members of the crew and two of the crew were presented with Competent Crew Certificates. By this time it was about twelve o'clock and so time to leave the John Laing and head home. We were all sad to leave the

boat, the staff and each other as although we had arrived knowing nobody, by the time we left we were all really good friends so there was a lot of swapping of phone numbers and email addresses!

I really enjoyed my time on the John Laing and was amazed how much I had learnt about sailing by the end of the voyage. I am really proud of earning my Start Yachting Certificate and would really love to come back again to learn more about sailing and earn my Competent Crew Certificate. The sea staff were great and everyone made me feel really welcome. Everyone was really understanding about my back brace which helped me to feel more confident about meeting new people and by the end of the trip I had definitely decided that my brace couldn't stop me doing what I wanted to! It was a great experience and I feel really privileged to have it. I've definitely caught the sailing bug!