

The night I nearly severed the road link to Sunderland Point

After reading Paul Mountford's account of his Isle of Man trip in the winter issue of Mainsheet and the ending in a wild and windy night, I wondered if I was out that weekend, and on checking my logs I saw it was the same night I nearly severed the road link to Sunderland Point.

The Saturday morning was fair with not too much wind so I went into the channels around Lune river buoys No.2 & 4 intending to trawl for shrimps. This is great fun in a 16' Wayfarer with the centre of effort changing all the time due to the warps.

By tea time the ebbing tide was too fierce so I ran Dr Syn aground near No.4 buoy to await the midnight tide back up to Glasson.

At around 9pm with the rising water, the wind started to increase, straight from the direction to Plover Scar (I've noticed this on other occasions also), and by the time I was afloat it was blowing quite hard.

With hardly any depth for the centre-board or room in the channel yet to tack I brought the "trusty" Seagull into action. By now the wind was so strong that unless I headed directly into it the wind would just turn the bows away and I'd be heading out to Barrow. The motor also refused to take full throttle and stalled each time. I then had to anchor and let the engine rest (I think the problem was fuel starvation). I also tried sailing with just a fully reefed main but it felt too dangerous and I couldn't point anywhere near where I wanted to go. By now it was pitch black and raining and the waves, although I could only feel them, seemed big for only a two mile fetch from Plover Scar, although the wind was now against the flood tide.

This turning round in circles, stalling and anchoring went on for what seemed like hours, at one point the anchor cable got round the centre board and put me broadside on, and what a struggle that was to release it - oh the joys of singlehanding. I'm glad it was dark so no-one saw me. However by 11pm I was near Plover Scar but the night was such that it was hard to tell when I dare turn North, what with the darkness, spray, rain and my glasses caked with the lot. Even passing the hamlet at Sunderland the waves were still large and when I turned the last corner to the club I could make no further progress whatever.

Just before 1am, slack HW, and after three tries of running back to the corner and starting again I gave up and turned for the anchorage near the toilets this end of Sunderland Point village. Like Barbarella wondering if she could stop at Piel, I wondered the same about Sunderland.

With the wind now as it was I new I had only one chance of the anchor biting straight away when amongst the yachts, however it did and I veered out all the cable. It was then I noticed a dark shape about five to ten yards away and at first took it to be a buoy, what with the waves and darkness. However after ensuring the anchor was in, I took a better look and determined it was the top of a post. There was nothing I could do about it as I knew as soon as I played with the anchor I would have been blown straight onto it, so I put the tent over the boom, made a cup of tea and turned in listening to the wind and rain wondering how I would get back next day, and hoping the anchor would hold as the waves were pitching the boat quite hard.

I awoke to complete stillness, but what a shock as I peered out and saw the post was infact the soft mud warning sign next to the road, if the anchor had dragged a few feet in the night I would have settled down right across the road and been woken by some angry motorist asking me to push 600 lb of dinghy back where it belonged, so he could get to church.