

An apprentice's voyage Kungsviken – Southampton

When purchasing my Malö 40 I was asked by the yard whether I would be willing to lend them my boat for the Southampton Boatshow due to take place in the middle of September 2008. This was certainly something I would consider but on one condition – that I could be part of the delivery crew as an “apprentice” as I didn't have any experience of this type of longer passage. I saw this as a fantastic opportunity both to get to know the boat and her behaviour at sea as well as to give the equipment on board a real test during a longer voyage – experiences which I thought would stand me in good stead for the future.

Then all that remained was to select the rest of the delivery crew, a task for Malö Yachts. The crew in the end consisted of myself and two very experienced skippers, Kay Kjellgard and Kaj Modig.

The preparations for the trip went very smoothly indeed and were certainly made easier by the experience and competence of Kay and Kaj as well as the support we received from the crew at Malö Yachts.

Thursday 27th August was our departure day. We left Kungsviken around 13.00 after loading the boat with personal belongings, provisions for at least five days and preparing her for long distance sailing. Unfortunately the weather gods were not on our side and the departure took place in light rain. At an early stage we decided not to follow our original plan to go on the outside of Denmark but instead to go out to the island of Käringön in order to pass between Läsö and Jylland to Grenå. As we reached Käringön we soon realised that the weather conditions we had been promised did not match reality at all. The wind was blowing approximately 30 knots and the wind direction was SW compared to W and the outlook for the night ahead was also promising winds up to 40 knots. We made the decision to go to Vrångö in the southern part of the Gothenburg archipelago. Around 19.30 we moored up in the outer visitors' marina. In the morning we realised the wind had reached speeds of 43 knots during the night but was due to ease a little in the afternoon.

We spent the morning walking around the island and visited the pilot station and chatted to some bird watchers who were hoping to spot some Gannets which are sometimes blown in from Denmark in strong westerly winds. By 13.00 we decided to get underway again. We decided to go straight toward Kiel, between the islands of Läsö and Anholt and then on through Great Belt. The wind had turned more to west and the wind strength had dropped to 30 knots. We tacked under sail and engine until we reached Kalundaborg in the early hours when we could finally turn off the engine and proceed under sail only. From Great Belt and south to Kiel we had a fantastic sail in perfect conditions and bright sunshine for most of the way. At 18.00 on 29th August we reached Kiel but as leisure boats aren't allowed into the Kiel Canal after 20.00 we didn't go through the lock until the following morning. The night was very quiet but cold and at 07.00, in beautiful sunshine, we were waiting by the lock to be let into the canal but unfortunately had to wait until 10.00 due to a lot of commercial traffic.

The journey down the Kiel Canal was a fantastic experience, to travel slowly in bright sunshine and light winds through fields and forests while occasionally coming face to face with huge commercial vessels.

After just over 52 miles we arrived in Brunsbuttel just after 17.00 where we took the opportunity to top up the diesel before carrying on. We then went through a lock which

took us onto the Elbe and it was clear that the current was still helping us along in spite of the incoming tide. Our perfect plan had been to arrive here three hours earlier to get maximum benefit from the tide and currents but as we were delayed at Holtenau we were worried that we had missed this opportunity.

Due to a few delays we decided not to go to Helgoland but to carry on following the "Inshore Traffic Zone" closest to the German and Dutch coastline down to Texel, the southernmost of the West Frisian Islands and from there start the channel crossing to Dover. The wind was strong during the night but the direction of it not ideal so we again found ourselves using the engine for support to keep an acceptable speed.

The sailing along the German and Dutch coast was very good and we didn't see many other boats in the "Inshore Traffic Zone". In the early afternoon the wind dropped and by the time we reached Texel it was almost completely still and oppressively hot. The forecasts we obtained didn't give us any signs to warn us that bad weather was afoot and so we were all determined to start motoring across the English Channel, one leg roughly 180 miles.

During the night however the wind picked up and reached about 40 knots on the nose. As we were more or less not moving at all, we decided to change our plans and go towards IJmuiden (Amsterdam). We made our approach in the morning around 08.00 and were allocated a visitors' berth which was also doubling as exhibition marina for the boat show which was due to open the following morning. We were well looked after by the Dutch Malö dealers and were able to have a look around the show as well as attend the VIP reception in the evening of 2nd September.

The high winds carried on the next day and according to the forecast were due to continue along the same lines the next couple of days. We were advised not to attempt our channel crossing under these circumstances but decided to continue further south via the canals which was the recommended alternative.

Equipped with canal charts to take us from IJmuiden to Vlissingen and other essential information, we set off from IJmuiden just after 13.00 in the rain. We had been given a short lesson in how to interpret the canal charts and information on the three bridges which only open a few times a day due to heavy traffic and this could of course be crucial to the amount of time we would take to arrive in Southampton. It didn't seem like any of the other bridges or locks should cause too much of a problem.

Unfortunately the first bridge we reached was the kind that only opens a few times a day. We missed the opening by about 30 minutes which meant at least a five hour wait for the next opening. This was a serious set back for our entire plan which would be very difficult to make up for as none of the bridges or locks are manned between the hours of 20.00 and 07.00 depending on the time of year.

The delay at the first bridge meant we had to pass through Harlem in darkness. In spite of this it was a fantastic experience floating through the centre of the old town with parks and buildings right next to us. We were encouraged several times to tie up in Harlem by the female bridge attendant who followed us all the way through the town on her bike in order to open all the bridges for us. We were keen however to get as far as possible in order to reach the next critical bridge. After some searching we came upon a night harbour south of Harlem where we were able to get a berth next to a much bigger boat. At first we had been allocated a very good berth but unfortunately the depth wasn't sufficient and we went

aground. The harbour master enquired as to our draught and when told he merely shook his head and we soon understood why when we realised that most guest harbours have a maximum depth of 2 meters.

We left our night harbour just before 07.00 the next morning in order to get through the next bridge as early as possible. Unfortunately the early start didn't help us as we had miscalculated the distance on the chart and didn't make it in time. This meant we had to wait another 4 hours. After that we were not under so much pressure and were able to relax and enjoy the ever changing surroundings of fields with cattle mixed with towns and buildings.

In Ablasserdam we found another marina to stay the night and this one had a more decent depth of 4 meters. As the marina was situated in the middle of the town we treated ourselves to a restaurant visit and made sure to stock up on provisions the following morning. We left the harbour at 10.00 in the morning in order to reach the next large bridge in plenty of time of its opening. As we approached it however, we could see it closing...15 minutes early. This caused a bit of a panic as this was one of the ones which only opens three times per day. We called out to the bridge attendant who, after a bit of convincing, agreed to open the bridge again. This was it, we had to reach the next bridge on time, or wait another five hours. Under full throttle we just managed, last boat through, to pass the opened bridge.

The rest of the day was very eventful with locks to take us from the man-made canals out to open water. At about 20.00 we went through our last lock into the canal which took us to Middleburg, our last night harbour before the crossing to England. We were allocated a very good spot where we tied up at 21.30 in the centre of the old town. We went for a walk to try to find a restaurant for a late supper but unfortunately they were all closed so it was back to the boat and a simple snack and to bed in preparation for our early start the next day.

We set off at 06.30 toward the lock in Vlissingen. We had intended to get some diesel but couldn't find anywhere open at this hour so we had no choice but to carry on to the lock. In total we travelled 70 miles on the canals and are all in agreement that this forced option was a very good one which has certainly left us wanting to go back for more of the same in the future.

Finally out of the lock in Vlissingen we set course for Dover again but we very soon realised that we were the only ones going this way. All other leisure vessels stuck close to the Belgian coast and after checking our charts and tide tables we also decided it looked like the better option. It was a good choice as the tide was with us and there was no other traffic to worry about. We carried on to Calais to set off straight across the channel from there and directly toward the Isle of Wight. This decision was based on the weather forecasts we had seen and decided the passage could be completed in a window between two low pressures. We didn't hesitate as the forecasts didn't give us anything to worry about and we were starting to feel the time pressure.

Out in the English Channel the wind picked up during the night, up to 46 knots. By this time we were so far out it wasn't worth thinking about going back but during the course of the morning as we were approaching land, the seas grew so rough that on our current course we were hardly moving at all. At this point we decided to change our plans once more and go to Brighton. Before making our approach we contacted the harbour master to check on the depth in the marina as the chart only stated 2.5m and low tide was in a few

hours.

According to the harbour master there would be no problem with the depth, however it was important to stay close to the pier and at the same time account for strong side winds. The approach to Brighton was an experience, very high side winds with high seas and a narrow entrance but with our experienced captain, Kay, at the helm she was guided in perfectly even if we did get hit by a big wave on one side which caused her to lie flat.

Finally in the marina we met crews from several boats who had been waiting there for days for the wind to drop enough to enable them to leave. Brighton's marina facilities were very good and with both shops and restaurants in the vicinity.

As I was needed back at work on the Monday I decided to jump ship in Brighton on the Sunday and fly back to Sweden.

The remaining crew, Kay and Kaj, left Brighton on Sunday afternoon when the wind had dropped off somewhat and they made their approach to Lymington late in the evening on 6th September.

For me personally I learnt a lot during this voyage and I got to know my boat under quite tough circumstances and at the same time got some experience of long distance sailing which has definitely made me certain to want to do it again in the future. Finally I would like to say a big thank you to my highly qualified and experienced colleagues Kay and Kaj and also to Malö Yachts who have delivered a boat which has exceeded not only my own expectations but also those of my crew members.

Bengt Meyer