

Mike Messing about on a Mac

Mike Hotard

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Seabird 5, Macwester Seaforth

I can hardly believe we are drawing to the end of another sailing season. I have had a busy time on the water this year and more tales to tell. As I reflect on my messing about on my Mac since the last Journal I think it has been one of the most varied and enjoyable seasons so far.

Winter at Wells next the Sea wasn't too eventful. I visited the boat in December, January, February and April to service the engine and do some maintenance. I managed to upset a few sailors from the Wells sailing club one weekend. Seabird is moored opposite the club house. I park on the road next to their dinghies. I had come down late Friday night and slept aboard. I planned to move my car into the town carpark the following morning before the 9:00 am parking restriction came into force. The sailing club arrived on mass at 6 am before high tide and do some racing. There were dinghies on their launch trailers all around my car. Opps. I came ashore to move my car out their way. Lots of grumbling, talk of obstruction, lack of consideration, having to struggle with the one ton dinghies. I apologised and said I would move my car out the way. Their sailing dinghies had blocked my car in and I was standing around for about 30 minutes. I guess they were thinking it was holding me up and inconveniencing me. I actually found the setting up and preparation of the dinghies quite interesting and wasn't going anywhere. (Except back to my boat for coffee and some breakfast) When one



of them eventually came across and asked if I would like to get out I said only if I'm in your way. The race steward came over to me later as the dinghies were going out and actually apologised to me. He said they were a grumpy lot and would get over it. No harm done I guess. So I might check the tides before I park there another time. I don't want to be a regular contributor to their grumpiness. Perhaps sailing in an open boat in the winter, early in the morning, getting wet and cold could make a person grumpy. Maybe they didn't really want to be there. Then it could be they do it so they can recount the hardship and boast how tough they are. I'm sure I gave them something to add to the days sailing conversations later over a pint at the club bar. Me, I prefer a heated wheelhouse to an open dinghy any day.

End of April and a couple of friends joined me for a boat cleaning weekend at Wells getting Seabird ready for her sail to Pinmill. We polished a bit, drank a bit, had fish and chips and later went aboard the Albatross in the evening for the live music and to drink a bit more. The music group were very good or maybe it was the drink. A most agreeable "working" weekend.



The time soon came in early May to make my annual journey down the East coast from Wells next the Sea to Pinmill on the River Orwell. My first choice crew and sailing buddies are Chris the previous owner of Seabird that lives near Wells and his good friend Vic. All was arranged for the tidal window May 4th. The day before sailing the crew bailed out on me. I ended up sailing my first solo down the coast! Their last minute drop out wasn't because they couldn't be bothered or found something else better to do but for genuine health issues. In fact Chris had had a "heart event" a couple of weeks previously, blacked out and spent two days in hospital. Turned out to be ventricle fibrillation. Doctors had prescribed some medication and said he may need a pacemaker fitting.

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They would monitor the situation to see if he had a re-occurrence. He hadn't told me about it and was still planning to come. His wife pointed out if he had another "event" while we were off the coast a paramedic could not be there in 20 minutes like his first episode. He has a number of ailments but can be very stubborn as he doesn't like his health dictating what he can and can't do. But after mulling over his wife's sage advice he told me the day before our sailing with great sadness and apology he didn't think he should come. He was feeling really bad he couldn't make it and was letting me down. When he shared what had happened with me I told him his wife was absolutely right. I said can you imagine sailing down the East coast with nowhere to turn in and you having a heart attack and needing a helicopter pick you up? With a ketch rig and no open cockpit I would have to drop the rib from the rear davits, get you in it and trail you out the back for them to winch you up. I would rather you not put me through that experience and followed your wife's advice. I suggested we could have a couple days out when Seabird was back at Pinmill and perhaps arrange a voyage up the coast and into the Deben. He felt better after that.



So having delayed the departure from Wells a couple of days because of gales with winds 40 knots plus I had a weather window of 3 to 4 days with light winds of around 10 knots forecast the May bank holiday. I was expecting a swell for the first day sailing after previous days high winds. I had filled a flask with coffee, made my sandwiches and had crisps and tins of soft drinks all in the wheel house so I wouldn't need to go below once on route. The fenders were tied on the coach roof hand rails for quick deployment and warps were out ready for arrival at Lowestoft. I thought I might be a little apprehensive setting off solo. But having made the journey half a dozen times with others I felt surprising calm, just no one to talk to. I had arranged to keep in regular contact with Chris ashore with my progress. That way if something did go wrong and he didn't hear from me I had someone to raise the alarm.

Leaving Wells there was a fishing boat coming in as I was making my way out the estuary. He passed wide and slow. I thought this was unusual courtesy to a recreational vessel from a fishing boat. I think I discovered why shortly after. He realised I wasn't your fair weather sailor. I was headed out into something worse than a fishing boats' wake. There was a big swell over the sandbar a mile offshore. It was close to the spring tide with plenty of height but the depth gauge was ranging from three feet up to nine under the keel. Once over the bar it was quite a ride. I found myself wondering if there is some calculation you can do to judge the height of the swell when you lose sight of the horizon in the troughs. My lunch and everything in the wheel house went flying. It would be a few hours before things started to settle down. I had some shaken not stirred lunch around two in the afternoon. I called ahead to the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk marina at Lowestoft to see if there was a visitors berth. They were most helpful as always. When I said I was coming in solo they provided someone to take my warps that made life easier. There was only one other visiting vessel that night which was no surprise given the heavy sea state.



The second leg to Pinmill was pretty uneventful. (That was until I got ashore.) Calmer seas and light winds so the packed lunch did not go for a ride around the wheel house floor this time. In fact after I left Lowestoft it sat there fixed in position on the locker seat calling out "eat me, eat me". I gave in to its' call. Lunch was gone by 9:00am. I went below and got a Pot Noodle later around midday. I arrived at Pinmill having arranged a friend from London I sail with to pick me up. He would drive me back to Wells next the Sea when I think "Where are my car keys?" Check my trouser pockets no keys, coat pockets no keys. I ask my friend to pull over so I can check my bag. No keys. I have left them on Seabird. There is a Victor Meldrew moment. "I don't believe it". My friend says that's OK I'll take you back to Pinmill we can get them and carry on again. I do a quick mental calculation. We will be back at Pinmill just before 8:00pm,

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low tide. There will not be enough water for me to get out to the boat in the dingy for another couple of hours. Once I do get the keys it is a 2 hour drive to Wells, then another 3 hours for my friend to get home that means he will not be home until gone 2 am in the morning. No I can't expect him to do that however willing. I tell him drop me off at Pinmill and go home. I have a Plan B. I'll spend another night aboard then will ring Chris in Wells to see if he is free to come and get me. He will no doubt be interested in my solo journey and we can have lunch at the Butt and Oyster. Plan B worked. All clouds have a silver lining they say.

It poured with rain that night and the following morning. I discovered there were some leaks in the boat above the water line. One of the dorade vents and around the windows in the wheel house. I took photographs of the points of ingress so I could attend to them next time on the boat. Good job I spent the extra night aboard.

I have made a couple of videos of my solo East Coast voyage. If you are interested you can watch them. Go to Youtube and search on my name Mike Hotard.



While at Pinmill I try to get out on Seabird every other weekend. I have a long list of willing and great potential crew that includes family, friends and work colleagues. It's an effort to find time to get them all aboard for a sail.

In June I had a Friday business meeting on Seabird with work colleagues. Makes a change from a pub or conference centre room. Having 4G aboard is a definite plus. Weather was good and they returned with partners next day for a Saturday sail. Dream job!

I caught up with an old School Friend in July I hadn't seen for years. I invited him and his wife out for the day with Sue and myself on Seabird for a proper catch up. We went down the Orwell, up the Stour and anchored up for lunch at Wrabness before we returned to Pinmill. While at Wrabness another sailing buddy and partner passed by and tied up alongside and joined us. Good times. I love the social aspect of sailing.



The next voyage out was the end of July and the Commodores Mac Meet for the Pinmill Barge race. Fellow Macwester owners Pete and Jane joined Sue and I aboard for the day as their Mac is out the water at present. The itinerary: Watch the race, make our way to anchor up at Erwarton Bay on the Stour for lunch, pro-

ceed to Shotley Marina where the Commodore had booked an overnight mooring on the pontoon for us. Join the Commodore aboard Wanderforth for drinks and nibbles before all meeting up in the Shipwreck Restaurant in the marina for dinner. A most agreeable day and thoroughly enjoyed. Thanks to Linda for organising.



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August came quickly and it was time to invite aboard Chris and Vic that had been unable to make the voyage down from Wells. We had a tidal window and good weather forecast to get up the picturesque River Deben to Woodbridge. Chris had made the journey many times. Although the last time he had visited was 2007 he was keen to take the helm and show us the way. Entrance is pretty straight forward compared to Wells as long as you follow the harbour masters instructions. Arriving around a couple hours before high tide we followed the buoys in



easily. We never had less than 4 feet under the keel over the sand bar. We passed Felixstowe Ferry weaving our way upstream through the moorings along the river and past Waldringfield. I rang the Tide Mill Yacht Harbour to ask what the latest time was for us to get into harbour over the sill. With about 4 foot 6 inch draft we had until around 6:00 pm to arrive. We were making good time so there was no problem with the deadline. As we were approaching the bend at Martlesham Creek I left the wheelhouse to go and get fenders and mooring ropes ready for our arrival at Tide Mill. I was on the foredeck attaching the mooring warp to the Sampson post when I noticed we were slowing down. While I watched the shoreline we came to a standstill. I then heard the engine rev higher and saw a wash of water and mud flowing forwards. Chris had run us into the "putty". He had taken his eye off the GPSS and was following the line of the river and gone straight into Martlesham Creek! We gunned the engine a few times in reverse but the bilge keels were stuck fast. We started to think we would be spending the night there. I went up to the pulpit and started rocking the boat side to side to see if I could loosen the keels in the mud. After about ten minutes she began to slowly move back and then we were free. We were bang on the high tide time wise but maybe there was a just whisker left that helped. Either way it was a relief to be back on route to the Marina. To say Chris was beating himself up and kicking himself for such an elemental mistake is an understatement. Vic and I were just amused. I don't think there is any sailor that can honestly say they have never run aground. We arrived safe at Tide Mill harbour with minutes to spare. The Harbour master has been there 14 years. He actually remembered Chris and Seabird visiting nearly 12 years ago. He said Seabird was quite a distinctive vessel. I liked that. He also told Chris he had got his own boat stuck himself in the past. Chris liked that.

MACWESTER SHOP

Is your old burgee looking a bit tattered?

Have you changed your vehicle and need a new car sticker?

You can purchase new ones at any time from your

Membership Secretary, Linda Nixon:

Burgee = £15.00 Car Sticker = £1.00

Macwester Owner Association Tie = £5.00

Cloth Badge (for blazer, etc.) = £5.00



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The Yacht Basin has had new facilities built not too long ago. We got showered in the new block and went into Woodbridge for an evening meal at the Anchor not far from the yacht basin. Excellent food I can recommend it. Welcoming and friendly service and reasonably priced. Next day we visited the Tide Mill Museum. Again well worth a visit. Fascinating history and I didn't know there had been a tidal mill



there for the last 800 years. We then went to "The Longshed." Here they have begun to build a replica of the Anglo Saxon ship discovered at Sutton Hoo in 1939. They are using the same tools and methods of the 7th century to build it and expect the project to take 2 years. They are just at the beginning so I think a return visit may be on next year to see how far they have progressed. We availed ourselves of refreshment at a coffee shop on the quayside before returning to Seabird.

We left Tide Mill at 3:30 when we could clear the sill on the rising tide. We had an uneventful trip back down river. We tied up on a visitors buoy at Felixstowe Ferry. The plan was to leave with the 5:00 am tide in the morning and return to the Pinmill mooring around 9:30 am to go ashore mid-morning. I went below to the

heads and when I returned to the wheelhouse there had been a crew mutiny. Well, more a crew suggestion really. "Why don't we carry on now with the tide to Pinmill? We can then have a lie in tomorrow morning." Well the prospect of a lie in was too powerful an argument to refuse. So we dropped the mooring and headed out over the bar. The wind was beginning to pick up. It probably would have had a bumpy night on the mooring right in the mouth of the Deben at Felixstowe Ferry had we stayed. We arrived back at Pinmill just after 9:00pm as it was starting to get dark. After a good night's rest we went ashore next morning for a full English at the Butt and Oyster before returning home.



Following weekend I welcomed a party of 4 work colleagues. SW wind forecast at 28 knots gusting to 38 knots increasing in strength. So near gale force. Who would go out in winds like that? **(Note from Hon. Ed: Me when crossing**

the Solent to Isle of Wight Beer and Buses for the second year running! Lively!) Well they say all fair weather never made a good sailor. Being partially sheltered on the Orwell River at least there wouldn't be a big sea. So we decided to go ahead and see how we got on. We motored against the tide under the bridge up to Ipswich. Then we turned back and drifted with the tide and half the head sail out. We were making nearly 6.5 knots over the ground and heeling over nicely with the occasional strong gusts. What's not to like? We could have secured things a little better. During the morning the fridge door pin hadn't been pushed in so the door flew open and spilled the fridge contents on the saloon floor. Bags and a few other things took a tumble and found their level. As we approached the Colliver port channel buoy it was gusting to 40 knots. We thought now would be good time to get the engine on and furl up the



headsail before we turned into the teeth of the wind. The furling drum jammed! While trying to release the drum it let the whole of the headsail out. A flapping headsail in 30 to 40 knot winds is noisy and pretty awesome but not good. I couldn't get the drum to roll up the sail. The ultra-violet strip was beginning to fray and there was a tear in the sail where it had been slapping against the deck spot light on the mast. The spotlight lens had been battered out of the housing. I still could not get the sail to furl so went to release the halyard and drop the sail. I released the wrong line and undid the topping lift. The dropping boom jerked on the lazy jacks lines and ripped the starboard spreader socket out the mast. Duh. To make matters worse I lost the end of the topping lift up the mast. We turned back up river to get some cover and shelter from the strong winds closer to the river bank to deal with the sail. We picked up a sheltered mooring where the wind was 15 to 25 knots.

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I worked on the furling drum and it started to turn. I got half the sail in before it jammed again. This time it was because the loose topping lift line was wrapping around the top of the rotating forestay. So I went forward and wrapped the rest of the headsail around the forestay between gusts and tied it up. Crew and boat safe. I was kicking myself for releasing the wrong line but I guess with all the noise of the sail and the lines frenzied frapping against the mast I just went for the wrong cleat. Maybe I should label them to make life easier in future? We had lunch then spent the rest of the afternoon motoring. Of course we got soaked coming ashore in the dinghy as the wind was blowing offshore and any spray from the bows

just went straight in the dinghy. All the crew loved the adventure day out and want to go again!

I thought about getting the boat into the yard at Pinmill and having the mast stepped to repair the damage myself. However with work and family commitments decided I would rather have time off work for sailing than fixing boats. Chris and Rob at Debbage Marina did a cracking job sorting out the repairs for me so I was back sailing in a couple of weeks. On the Debbage pontoon without the main mast I still thought Seabird looked a fine vessel. But I am biased of course.

Debbage Marina unstepped the mast and had new stainless spreader sockets made. Debbage fitted the new sockets, replaced the deck spotlight and relocated the lazy jack pulleys to the mast. So if I or someone else makes the same mistake again in future with the topping lift it won't result in a broken spreader.

The beginning of October I start thinking and preparing for the sail back to Wells next the Sea. I brought Seabird onto the hard at Pinmill to clean the undersides ready. The scrubbing posts have a water tap that I can connect my pressure washer to. I have a suitcase generator that provides the 240v power.

It makes cleaning the underside easy as it blasts off any seaweed and slime. It leaves a few barnacles that I can scrape off before applying a coat of antifoul. I booked the scrubbing post space on the hard earlier in the week and asked if the water could be turned on. All good so I thought. The Friday high tide was around 4:00pm so I arrived midday to get ready to bring Seabird in. When the yard went to turn on the water for me there was a leak from the pipe in the building where the public disabled toilets are. They regrettably informed me they couldn't leave the water on as it would flood the toilet block. This left me plan B, elbow grease. A 4 inch scrapper to remove the growth and barnacles and a scouring pad to remove the green slime. It took me about four times as long to clean underneath. I felt like I had been in a fight the next morning when I got up from all my aching muscles.

Finally I saw this mug and felt compelled to buy it. Is there something wrong with me and is there a cure? If there is do I want to be cured?

Well that's my messing about on my Mac since the last journal. So once again by the time you read this article weather permitting I should have made the annual voyage from Wells back to Pinmill. Trust you will be in the water too. Maybe next year more owners will make it to the Commodore's Barbeque the August Bank Holiday. Maybe some of us will arrange or make it to a Mac meet in their area. Until then safe messing about and sailing on your Mac's to all.

