

## Diary of the SEGAS Cruise to the East Coast

14<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2020 (and some boats returned even later...)

It was a long cruise with changing weather, boats going their different ways, good company, lots of laughs and sometimes challenging conditions (for some). I will not mention individual names instead referring to the names of the boats. Just in case the reader is wondering whilst reading this, I can assure you that in the end all the boats made it home safely!

Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2020



As usual, Segas cruises start on a Friday afternoon sailing to Stangate for a night at anchor. However not this year! Three 'little' ships, Mystique, Moyana and Sirrus decided to sneak away that morning just after HW and make their way across the Thames to the River Crouch. They were hoping to get a little bit more breeze, as the forecast for the following day was for light winds and probably having to use the engine most of the way. They were also planning to anchor in the River Roach thereby shortening the distance to travel. The other 'bigger' boats left Gillingham separately and one by one assembled in Sharfleet creek for the night. Later we could see each other but there were three boats still missing! Yes, we are looking out for each other and our cruiser captain wants his herd to be complete. Over the radio at dusk we heard that Moonfleet was on her way. She arrived just before darkness fell and anchored safely in Sharfleet. A little later Beluga informed us that they were not quite ready and would join us early the next morning. The last boat to arrive was Bonnes Fortune. Eventually, they called us up and reluctantly admitted that they had arrived in Stangate but got disorientated and were stuck somewhere on the mud (and it was just before HW!). Nevertheless, the skipper sounded undisturbed, wishing everyone a good night and they would catch up with us the next morning. From the 'little' boats we heard that they made it to the River Roach and were safely lying at anchor.

**7nm**

Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020

After a quiet night we woke to a grey and overcast morning – no wind whatsoever. Immediately our thoughts turned to Bonnes Fortune, had they 'fallen over' on their side? The skipper sounded cheerful on the radio, as they had stayed upright and woken up at first light to survey their predicament. They found themselves VERY close to the shore! The other boats from Sharfleet weighed anchor and motored round into Stangate to see if any assistance was required. There they were circling like vultures around Bonnes Fortune waiting for the tide to lift her off and out of her sticky berth. None of the deep keeled yachts could get close enough. Would someone have to go for a swim to get a tow line across? The skipper and crew on the stricken craft seemed relaxed, and finally the tide was high enough, the engine was started, and she floated off joining the other boats going towards the Medway and the Thames. Two

old Thames Barges were also present in Stangate. 'Marjorie' from Ipswich was busy weighing her heavy anchor. The whole time while we were waiting for Bonnes Fortune two chaps were working hard on the anchor winch. And 'Niagara' (white hull) motored past the assembled craft into Stangate up from the Medway. Always a beautiful sight of times gone by. To complete the picture Beluga told us over the radio that they had left Gillingham and would be joining us in due course. The cruise could begin in earnest!

There is not much I can report of the next 47 nm to Farmbridge. We had no wind, the engines did what was expected of them, on Serenity we saw a porpoise in the still waters of the Thames, we saw some anglers on a fishing boat hauling in a big fish. Near the Inner Whittaker buoy the wind teased us into raising the sails but then died away again. In the Crouch the tide turned against us, so the engine was fired up once more. Tired but satisfied ALL boats made fast in Fambridge Yacht Haven in late afternoon, finally joined by the boats from the River Roach. Nothing much happened this evening apart from tidying the boats, making something to eat and turning in for a well-deserved rest.



**47nm**

Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020

We were staying in the marina today. This gave us the opportunity to meet and chat with each other on our boats, going for a walk to the village and just relaxing. Late afternoon we had a 'socially-distanced' gathering to congratulate the crew of Violet Mai on her birthday! Suddenly cupcakes with candles came out of nowhere, G&T and other drinks were poured. We had a wonderful evening standing around a bench and some chairs on top of the sea wall with our boats far below us at LW in the late evening sunshine. It felt good!

**7nm**



Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Another 'day-off' from sailing. It was time to go shopping to stock up on provisions, doing some maintenance and enjoying the company of other SEGAS members, which is such a great asset of this club! The cruiser captain and some skippers started planning ahead. Unfortunately, the weather forecast did not look favourable for the coming days or even to sail back to the Medway on the coming weekend. Later more about this topic, but for now we were happy in Burnham and in the evening a Gin Tasting was to be held while we were still all here! This proved to be another great success. The weather was a little cooler but after some drizzle the sky cleared, and we stayed dry while we were sipping and tasting 6 different Gins and almost sinking the pontoon! Skipper of Violet Mai and First Mate of Serenity did a marvellous job in giving out exact measures of Gin and Tonic. And the winner was – 'Old Tom' a Gin from ALDI!



Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Initially the plan was to sail to Brightlingsea but due to the windy forecast this was delayed, and we decided to stay another day in Burnham. Nevertheless, the skipper of Moonfleet had become restless and wanted to unfurl the sails so he invited skipper and mate of Serenity to join them for a day's sailing on the Crouch. The sky was grey and threatening rain, so we put on our sailing gear and motored out of the marina. We had good wind so set the sails pointing downriver and made good speed. Suddenly to all our surprise the headsail came out of the groove of the foil and was flapping about violently. Fortunately, we were 4 people on board and managed to furl the sail away, then lowered it down and raised it up again in its track. No more problems after that, we turned round and sailed all the way to the end of the Crouch. It was a great experience sailing on another boat.



Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020

The discussions were ongoing; do we stay, or do we go? Forecast for today was wind S or SE, veering SW 4 or 5, occasionally 6. Moonfleet and Serenity decided that it was time to go and left Burnham in the morning. The sun was shining, the wind was light, and we managed about 2-3knots over the ground against the incoming tide sailing towards the Inner Whittaker. As we were making slow progress, we decided to cross the Ray Sands. The tide was high enough and the advice from the skipper of Moyana was to go exactly 1-degree E and then turn due North. As Serenity has had a bad experience in the past when crossing the sands, we implemented this and were relieved that we had a minimum depth of 2.9m on this trajectory. We will keep this track on our chart plotter for future reference! We were enjoying ourselves and the skipper of Moonfleet suggested that we set the anchor and go for a swim. But once we had reached the River Blackwater the wind increased as per forecast and we had a cracking sail up to Bradwell marina – but no chance of a swim! We had to wait until 5 o'clock but when the bar and terrace opened, we enjoyed a well-deserved pint looking out over the marina and the Blackwater in the sunshine. Later a combined spontaneous dinner party took place on Serenity. From then on, the weather went downhill!

**20nm**



Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> August 2020

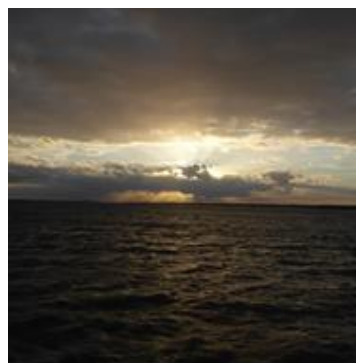
As expected, Storm ELLEN moved in and we spent a wind-swept day ashore, listening to the wind howling in the rigging! We secured our lines to the pontoon and put extra lines on, took the cockpit tent and the sprayhood down to reduce windage, did some maintenance and went for a walk to the village and shop. Later we met for lunch, played cards in the afternoon, and went out in the evening for an excellent meal in the Green Man, the local pub in Bradwell. The fish menu can be highly recommended! Our plan was to sail back to Burnham the next day to join our fellow club sailors and sail together back to the Medway on Sunday. That is how determined we were!

Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2020

It was windy!! But not as windy as yesterday – yet. Looking at forecasts which showed the wind in the 20's but not 30's we set off and left Bradwell marina at 11:45, once we had enough water under the keel to get over the bar at the entrance. The forecast at 6am showed F5-7 and we ignored the 7 and hoped for the 5, not a good move. The wind was from the W and we unfurled half the genoa and made great progress with the tide, followed by another brave boat, a Bavaria 34 who sailed under full genoa and disappeared into the distance. Moonfleet and Serenity stayed close together sailing past the power station. Initially Serenity pointed the bow towards the Ray Sands (shorter journey) but realised that this might be too risky (as Moonfleet suggested too bumpy) and both yachts steered towards the Wallet Spitway. This we crossed at good speed and with enough depth under the keels and 35kts of wind. So far so good. Moonfleet took a slightly different route via the Swallowtail channel whereas Serenity pointed towards the main channel of the Crouch – and fell behind. Moonfleet made good progress and got further and further ahead while Serenity was slowed down by the turning tide and the speed went down to 0.4 kts over the ground at some stage. Was it time to deploy the anchor and wait for the flood? Fortunately, the engine of Serenity kept us going and once we had entered the Crouch our speed increased, and the tide had slowed. It is interesting that in a situation like this a speed of 2 kts over the ground can feel fast! We could not be reached on the VHF and finally could reassure our cruiser captain via mobile phone that we were ok but slightly delayed... (we had forgotten to turn our AIS on!) A little later we could see Moonfleet lying at anchor in the entrance to the River Roach and they probably had put the kettle on by now. In the end we reached the safety of Burnham marina at 20:30, just before darkness fell and we were so grateful for our fellow club members who welcomed us and took our lines!! Thank you all so much! The maximum wind speed we had encountered was 35kts and we had periods of consistently 23 -28kts, and always on the nose! It is interesting how many things still fly around the cabin even if you think you have stowed everything away securely. We quickly tidied up the boat, cooked bacon with beans and fried eggs and enjoyed a can of beer (0% alcohol) followed by a shower. Then we turned in relieved and very tired. Thanks to a good boat, a good engine, and a fantastic First Mate!!

**27nm**





Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2020

This was an easy day! Most boats were ready at 6am to brave the elements and sail home today. Reluctantly we said goodbye to Mystique (but the skipper was up to help with the lines), Moyana, Bonnes Fortune and Sirrus as they wanted to wait a few more days for better (calmer) conditions. The forecast predicted wind from the West around 20 – 25 kts, so we set sail, first heading downriver with the last of the ebb to the Inner Whittaker. Once we turned south into the Middle Deep towards the Maplin Approach buoy the wind showed his true form of 20-28 kts from the west and we were hurtling along at a comfortable speed with one reef in the main and a couple of rolls in the genoa. Some boats went ahead with the help of the engine, others were behind. But all were in good spirits and we were checking up on each other at regular intervals. Once past the Maplin buoy the wind was not so favourable anymore and we could not point directly towards Sheerness. But we kept going crossing the shipping lanes without any trouble and headed towards the Sheppey coast. In the distance we could see Moonfleet tacking in deeper waters out in the Thames. Who would make it first past Sheerness into the Medway? The 'race' was on... As it turned out we both, carried by the flood, sailed past the huge oil rigs into the Medway at the same time! Tacking along the Sheppey shore or staying out in the Thames was neither an advantage. Moonfleet and Serenity 'shadowed' each other the whole way up the Medway to Gillingham with Moonfleet having eked out a slight advantage when we finally started the engine to motor the last few yards to our mooring buoys.

52nm

180nm sailed in total





Bonnes Fortune sailed home the following Tuesday, Moyana and Mystique made it back on Wednesday. And finally, Sirrus sailed home on Friday.

East Coast Cruises, you never know what surprises the weather has in store.

Nevertheless, a wonderful and at times challenging cruise in brilliant company has come to an end for this season.

Author: Martin Kuhn

Photos by:

- Peter Hawkins.
- Skipper of Concerto (another Westerly owner whilst sailing past...)
- Martin Kuhn