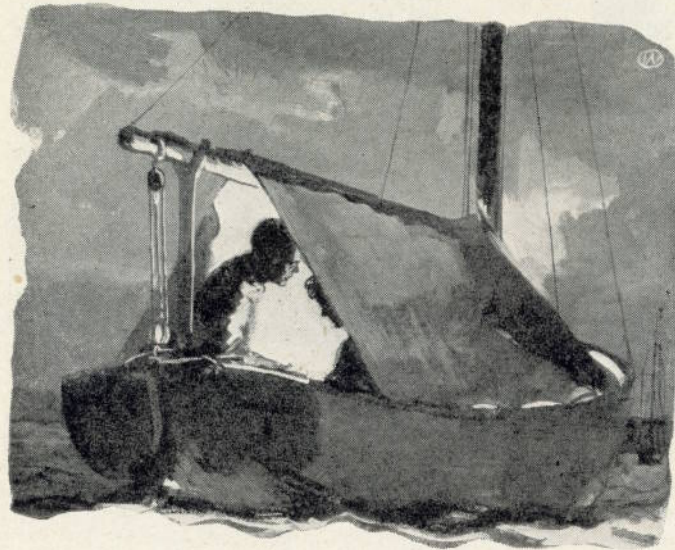


# Solent Holiday



## TWO BOYS AND A 12FT SAILING DINGHY

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PUT UP THE TENT  
AND COOKED OUR  
SUPPER

FOR the whole of the previous week we had been experiencing S.W. gales, and it was with the encouragement of "There will be gales and rain spreading through the South of England during the day" that we set sail from Eling at the very top of Southampton Water for a week's camping in a 12ft dinghy. I was just fourteen, and my friend Tony's seventeenth birthday fell during the holiday.

We left Eling just after twelve o'clock on Sunday, Aug. 11, 1946, to sail across to Cowes where we intended to sleep for our first night. There was a nice southerly breeze which enabled us to reach Cowes with full sail and without getting soaked. We left the boat at a slipway near the Island Sailing Club and took a stroll along the green. We bought ices, and walked as far as Gurnard. By this time the wind had fallen light, and we could see the tide sluicing past the buoys in Cowes Roads where a Polish frigate was anchored.

Passing the Royal Yacht Squadron, we noticed that the south cone was hoisted and enquired at the small building from which the signals were made as to the weather forecast for the next day, only to be told—"gales and rain."

We did not allow this to discourage us and rowed out to a spare mooring buoy, put up the tent, cooked our supper and got into bed. This no sooner done than it began to pour with rain, but the canvas did its job well and neither of us got wet.

When we awoke in the morning there was certainly a gale blowing, so we had breakfast, took two reefs in the mainsail, leaving about 30 square feet, and with no jib set we ran down Solent to Wooton Creek. On coming to the mouth of the creek I was surprised to see a large number of houses on the

higher ground as well as a large yacht yard.

We sailed right up to the bridge, where we went ashore to stretch our legs, but, feeling hungry, we soon got under way again and anchored farther up the river, where we erected the tent and cooked a good dinner.

A local yachtsman was very kind to us, giving us food and the use of his boathouse for our headquarters. In the evening he insisted on us sleeping aboard his yacht, the Mazurka, as it was raining hard, and we were very pleased to do this, and slept soundly all night. The Mazurka is one of the old

gaff-rigged Solent One-design class.

In the morning, as the gale was still blowing, we decided to go by bus to Ryde, as it would be impossible to land there from a small boat and, anyway, I did not want to go too far to leeward of Southampton Water because beating up Solent in a 12-footer can be quite uncomfortable, as we were to find out later.

On returning to Wooton in the afternoon we decided to take a chance and beat back to Cowes for the night and then to Beaulieu, as our stores would not last for ever. So, with one reef in the mainsail, we set out once more.

The seas were still running fairly high, but we thought the wind would probably ease off later on, so we pointed up to Cowes as best we could, and were just getting into our stride when suddenly the rudder hit a rock and was wrenched from its bar at the bottom. Our rudder is of the type fitted to whalers, and it was the fitting at the bottom of the rudder which had wrenched off, but, being made of gun-



"THE SEAS BEGAN TO GROW LARGE AND UNCOMFORTABLE"

metal, it had not broken and we were able to make a repair and carry on.

As we drew farther towards the centre of the Solent the seas began to grow large and uncomfortable, so, after three or four had lopped right over the bows and over the coaming as well, we decided to go about and stand-in for the Island shore. After an uneventful wet four-hour beat we arrived off Old Castle Point, where the tide was racing past the Point, against us, and we were unable to make any headway at all until we stood inshore into the eddy—one advantage of cruising in a small centre-board boat.

As we had expected, the wind began to drop off, but, being unable to shake out the reef, for this would have meant lowering the mainsail and being swept back by the tide, it took us a long time to beat up to Cowes. However, we arrived at about 8 o'clock, went ashore to send some postcards to our parents, and then rowed out to the same mooring that we had used on our previous visit, and slept soundly all night.

Next morning we awoke early, had breakfast and went ashore to buy some more bread. After doing our shopping we walked along the green, bought a glass of lemonade and a bun from one of the stalls, and watched the yachts setting sail for Southampton. We then made our way back to the boat and cooked our dinner. An International 14-footer and a Hamble star boat were making sail at the Island Sailing Club slip and were soon off. We decided to follow, so with one reef down we set sail for Beaulieu.

As we sailed past Victoria Pier we saw the International reaching back into Cowes, close reefed, but going like a train, with the crew bailing furiously—so much for the seaworthiness of the Internationals. Close behind followed the Hamble star. However, we took no notice and sailed out across Cowes Roads, thinking we would make Beaulieu close hauled; but the tide had

"—SHE WAS RUNNING  
UNDER!"



changed, and the wind, which was against it, had risen a good deal, causing a nasty steep sea, which seemed to be very uncomfortable even for a converted Itchen ferry boat. We carried on past the Sewer Area Buoy, with every other wave coming over the bows and into the boat. Oh for a thirty square metre! We saw a schooner of about one hundred tons beating up Solent with her trysail set on her mainmast.

By the time we were about a mile from the mainland I realized with horror that the white building for which I had been steering was not the boathouse at the mouth of the Beaulieu River, but a shed farther to the east. It was impossible to pinch up and make the river on this tack, and the seas by now had reached a height which looked like twelve to fifteen feet, although, of course, they were nothing of the kind, but much too high to put about in a twelve-foot dinghy.

I quickly decided that we should have to run down the Solent to Calshot and then reach into the Hamble River. This was easier said than done, for as soon as I pulled the tiller to windward the boat began to plane at a frightening speed on the tops of the waves, and before long an extra large wave bore

down on us and the boat shot forward and downward at a tremendous speed. The bow wave shot away about four feet and the bows began to bury—she was running under! At once I ordered Tony to down mainsail, at the same time scooping gallons of water over the lee bow. "Whew! what a near escape!"

We got the mainsail in at last and ran on under foresail alone. The boat was now eased greatly, and Tony bailed out. By now we were both a bit shaken, and I made it a rule not to look astern, as the huge waves piling up were enough to turn any sailor's stomach.

On looking about us we saw the Dragons racing with full-reefed mainsail and no foresail, while the Sixes were racing with one reef and intermediates set. When we reached Calshot Spit Buoy the latter class were rounding on their first lap. Circe was first round the buoy, with Fane, and an American Six, close on her heels. However, Fane, instead of carrying on for her second lap, hauled down her flag and headsail and tore away up the Hamble. I have raced in a Six-metre myself and know how wet they can be in any sea, as well as being very hard work to sail.

It was soon time to round up to sail up the Hamble. We got ready to re-hoist the mainsail, but found that it was possible to sail under foresail alone with the tiller nearly amidships. As we looked up Southampton Water, Hythe and the Docks could not be seen because of the heavy rainstorm, so we sailed up as far as Hamble, hoping to find an unused mooring to which we could make fast and hoist the tent before the rainstorm broke.

A boatman shouted to us that the buoy we were on would be needed by one of the racing yachts, and that we should have to move farther on, so we let go the buoy and started to sail up the river, but before we could find another berth the rain came down in torrents.

Our bedding was thoroughly soaked, so, thoroughly tired and wet, we decided to call it a day and caught the first bus home.



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