“A Rally within a Rally”

A second impromptu Seaward Rally at Bucklers Hard Marina!

Little did I know when I signed up for the Royal Southern Yacht Club (RSrnYC) Rally at Bucklers Hard Marina, on the Beaulieu River, that it would also become another impromptu Seaward Rally!

Nestled within the heart of the New Forest National Park, Bucklers Hard Marina lies on the banks of the Beaulieu River, one of the few privately-owned tidal rivers in Britain. Forming the south-east edge of the Beaulieu Estate, the river has been in the custodianship of the Montagu family and their ancestors since 1538, when Henry VIII closed Beaulieu Abbey and sold its lands to Thomas Wriothesley. The marina is an ideal location from which to explore nature within the New Forest (a Special Area of Conservation), as well as the riverside village of Bucklers Hard with its rich maritime history.

Beaulieu River

The Royal Southern Yacht Club Rally was held over the weekend of 9 – 10th August, and while the voyage to the Beaulieu River entrance is barely an hour and a half from Hamble, where I and my Seaward 23 “Sea Rider” are based, I had never visited it by water prior to the rally. Having signed up to participate, I was delighted to see that a Seaward 29 “Proper Job”, owned by Arthur and Denise Smythe-Wright, was also on the list of attendees. Berthing and a Saturday night BBQ was pre-arranged for all boats, but otherwise we could please ourselves what we did.

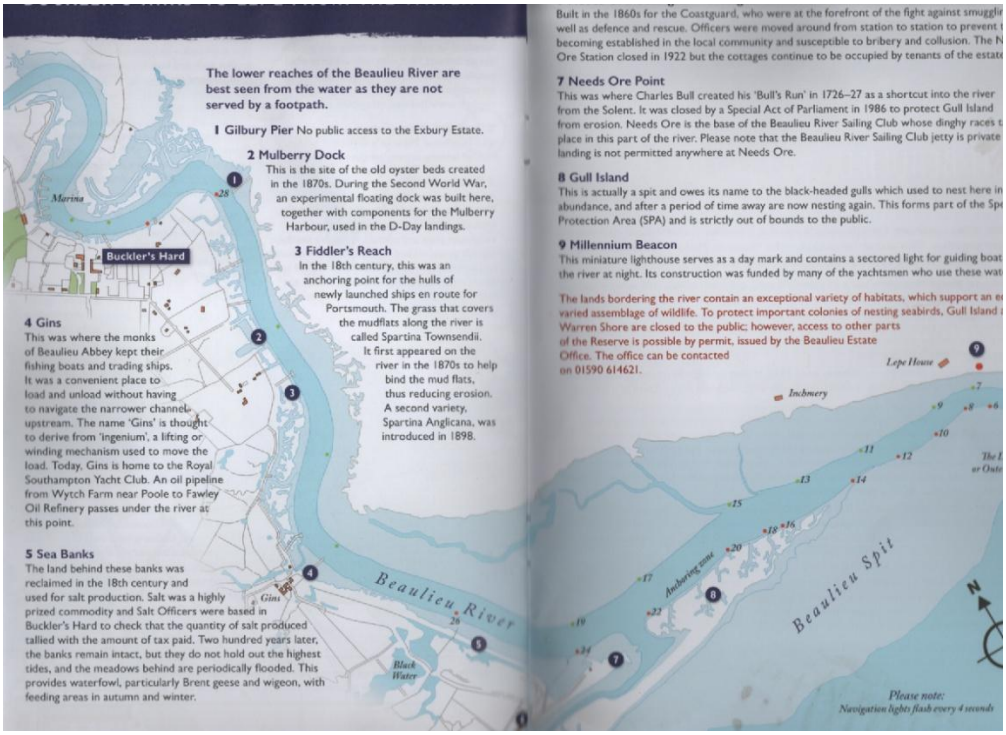
Peter Trowill was my crew, and he is now an honorary member of the Seaward Squadron, having attended both this year’s Scottish Seaward Rally and the Central South Coast Regional gathering at Mercury Marina in Hamble, 2 years ago.

We set off on Saturday from Hamble around high water and were surprised to find that conditions in the Solent were very lively. Wind against tide caused a steep Solent chop around Stone Point and we had a bumpy ride to the Beaulieu entrance. But like all Seawards, Sea Rider took it in her stride, shaking off the water that broke over the pilot house as she pitched and rolled, never digging her bow into the waves.

Once past the Red Dolphin outer mark and the Millennium Beacon, we enjoyed a peaceful cruise of more than 1 nm up the straight lower reach of the river, past Gull Island (which is actually a spit). It is quite surreal, looking southeast across unbroken water to the Isle of Wight, while knowing from the chart that Beaulieu Spit would impede any attempt to take a short cut across it.

There used to be a cut-through to the Solent at Needs Ore Point, but it was closed in 1981 by a Special Act of Parliament to protect Gull Island from erosion.

The first bend in the river leads to a second straight between the Beaulieu River Sailing Club and Gins, where the monks of Beaulieu Abbey used to keep their fishing boats and trading ships. Gins is now home to the Royal Southampton Yacht Club.



Reproduced from the Beaulieu River Handbook (Bucklers Hard Yacht Harbour)

On the opposite side of the river lies Exbury Point, part of the beautiful Exbury Gardens so famous for the stunning displays of azaleas in the springtime. Exbury House was requisitioned by the MoD during WWII and features in Nevil Shute's book "Requiem to a Wren".

Azaleas at Exbury Gardens

Exbury House

A gentle S-bend leads into Fiddlers Reach, past several private landing stages and a site where an experimental Mulberry Dock, plus components of the Mulberry Harbour, were built, prior to deployment for the D-Day landings.

At last, after more than 3.5nm, we rounded a sharp S-bend and spotted the pontoons of Bucklers Hard Marina, attractively laid out in a curve. The RSrn fleet was rafted on the southern visitors' pontoon, with Seaward 29, Proper Job tucked in alongside the pontoon and a raft of 4 beamy motorboats ahead and astern.

It was deemed that the two Seawards should be moored alongside each other! So I gritted my teeth and wriggled Sea Rider into the gap, watched in consternation by the Harbour Master and by Peter, who was convinced that the boat would become hooked up on the overhanging bow anchor of the outboard motorboat on the downstream raft. Once we were safely alongside Proper Job, the Harbour Master congratulated me on an incident-free landing, but said it was just boasting when I mentioned that Sea Rider does not have bow thrusters.

With the cockpit canopy down, Peter and I enjoyed a very late lunch in the sunshine, while chatting idly with our neighbours, "over the fenders". Earlier in the week I had invited Gill and Mike Barron, whose permanent mooring for their Seaward 29 "Alacrity" is at Bucklers Hard Marina, for drinks at 18.00. The invitation was now extended to Arthur and Denise on Proper Job.

The appointed time found the six of us having pre-dinner drinks and nibbles in true Seaward Squadron style, in the open cockpit of Sea Rider, and so began an impromptu 'Seaward Squadron Rally within a Rally'. We all happen to be proud owners of a Seaward 29, with my 29 "Indigo" being based in Scotland. This meant that we were able to compare notes – the pros and cons of galley up or down, the trauma of leaking shaft seals and various potential modifications to the boats were discussed.

Cockpit party: L-R Mike, Gill, Denise, Steph Arthur

BBQ: L-R Peter, Mike, Arthur, Gill, Denise

Then due to one boat dropping out of the RSrnYC rally, Gill and Mike were able to join us for the BBQ, which was truly excellent: steak and a selection of salads, followed by cheesecake and chocolate brownie, with strawberries and cream. As Peter commented, it is very rare to find a steak where you can eat it all (i.e. no gristle), but that's how the meat was at this BBQ.

After a lovely day and relaxed evening in great company, we said our 'good nights' and retired to our bunks.

Peter and I arose at a civilised hour and left slightly later than the raft of motorboats behind us, which made our departure quite easy. We went exploring further up river, our route often impeded by kayaks and paddleboards, until lack of detail on the chart persuaded us to turn back and go home. Alacrity and Proper Job had disappeared by the time we passed the marina.

It was the end of a great weekend and another impromptu Seaward Squadron rally – which can be defined as boats that go places and people that have fun! Why not sign up for the next Central South Coast Region muster at Lymington in September and join us?

Wishing you all safe sailing for the rest of the 2025 season.

Steph Merry

Commodore, Seaward Squadron