

# Round Britain Experience 1 - 2009

## The experience begins Leg 1

Welcome to the Round Britain Experience 2009 blog. I am George, I went to St Katherine's Dock London this weekend, April 4 and 5, to meet and greet our April 2009 Round Britain Experience clients.

Chris, he is the skipper / instructor for the first 2 weeks, and I arrived on the Saturday afternoon in order to prepare and clean the boat, after a week in London it is covered in a very fine coating of soot (muck), anyway boat prepared Chris checked equipment and put a couple of days food on board.



The clients (students) for this year's April Round Britain Experience are Megan, Peter and Tony  
There Skipper/Instructor for Leg 1 - Chris Bracewell

Have been chatting to Chris who reported a good start to our April Round Britain Experience. The first week threw up gale warnings (F8 soon) steady F3/4 from the South and absolutely no wind. Spirits high and everyone getting on with each other.

Others will be joining them at different stages for varying periods of time.

They have mixed experiences with Megan just completed a round the world excursion on a cruising boat out of the Caribbean. Her boss has given her the three months off to complete the Round Britain Experience.

It was nice to meet and greet each of the students and welcome their families and friends who had come to see them off, or make sure they really are going Round Britain.



We locked out of St Katherine's Marina Monday at 1045 with the sun shining on Tower Bridge always an impressive sight but especially poignant at the start of our voyage.

The muddy waters of old father Thames beckoned us seawards down past the Dome now revived as O2.

Passing through the Thames Barrier with a cheery wave from the chief controller we continued on past Barking Creek. Not a name to invoke thoughts of sun kissed tropical beaches but exciting for us.

Approaching Gravesend we spied a white flag being waved..... what? Are we expected to surrender so soon.

Obviously not as the flag turned out to be a white notice bearing the words "Good luck Tony"....his family had turned out to wave goodbye. A few blasts on the fog horn with lots of waving heightened the spirits even more.

With sails drawing we entered the Medway at 1630 passing Sheerness completely bereft of vessels. "Looks like a ghost port" commented Megan. Sign of the times we thought.

Tacking our way up the Medway we entered Chatham Marina at 1900 and moored up.

Hand crimped Cornish pasties, carrots and potatoes never tasted so good.

Tuesday morning heralded fine and breezy and a good time was had intensively practising manoeuvring Six Isles.

Peter was tempted by bargains in the shopping mall and came back with numerous pairs of trousers and stylish clothes we haven't seen yet.

Leaving Chatham Marina we proceeded upstream dodging round sandbanks to pass Tonys' old workplace.

Having been forewarned they were all out to wave him off..... he felt somewhat moved by this obvious display of regard

Heading back to Queenborough, Thames Coastguard forecast a gale 8 soon.

Tying up alongside Queenborough mooring lighter doubled up on all lines we prepared for a stormy night.

As it happened it was a snug berth and apart from moaning and rattling rigging we had a good night.

Wednesday dawned grey and miserable, ideal for a morning of theory and chartwork. The day quickly improved and the afternoon was spent doing MOB practice, tacking, gybing and generally becoming familiar with sailing Six Isles. Chris, the skipper felt confident enough to go below and leave us to sail the boat ourselves. It was then back to our Queenborough lighter to prepare for the next days trip to Ramsgate.

After departing Queenborough under leaden skies we had a cracking sail to Ramsgate arriving in sunshine, a delicious meal prepared by Tony was a fine end to a cracking day.



April 12, We all awoke fresh and enjoyed the one stop shop facilities (constant flow shower and loo all in one) one more time. Our nominated skipper of the day Peter took us out of the marina and for a leisurely sail under an overcast sky over to Osborne Bay on the Isle of Wight. We dropped the hook and settled in for some tidal theory work, lunch and most definitely tea and coffee. We joined the droves of ferries and leisure craft heading for Cowes where Peter took us alongside. A gorgeous afternoon meandering down the high street with ice cream followed by a cheeky drink at the Anchor Inn with our attention focused on the race boats on the TV. We all commented on how much more exciting the sport is to watch now we are forming an understanding. Heading back to Six Isles to soak in the sunny atmosphere and watch from our front row cockpit, the ferries and numerous boats whizzing past all while Chris slaved away in the galley preparing a feast.

April 13, first lesson as being skipper of the day, is there enough milk for tea and coffee? with Megs as skipper this is never high on the priority list as she is only drinking fruit tea to keep warm and to fit in!! Sailing wise, not such a great day with not much wind about. All the same we cruised down the Solent watching all the traffic heading the other way. The other way being back to work after

the Easter weekend. Say no more, we carried on and enjoyed lunch to the West of Lymington. The sun shone through making the Needles an even more impressive sight against the blue sky. Onwards and upwards or westwards rather onto Poole. Some of the most expensive real estate in Britain did not draw our attention as we navigated the snake of channel markers into Poole Marina at 17.30 where Megs had to berth as she describes what felt like 500 ton Six Isles through a narrow space that only a tender could fit in not hitting the million pound boat next door. After the pressure was off she realised there was plenty of room. We watched an old sailing ship dotted with crew in blue and white striped shirts which looked like we could have arrived during Mardi Gras. It was a few minutes after we realised it was an organisation giving underprivileged teenagers a chance to learn a bit about sailing, in odd shirts. Tony cooked up beef olive and a scrummy dessert which all disappeared in a matter of minutes.



April 14, Tony took us for a 30 mile passage to Weymouth along the stunning Jurassic coast of Dorset. Caves which were created by getting battered by the sea and just above, green fields as far as the eye could see. Tony has a soft spot for Lulworth Cove which we stopped in and appreciated briefly for its slanting rock formations and clear blue water. Passing more dramatic cliffs en route to Weymouth we arrived to prepare ourselves for our first rafting experience. Tony brought us alongside smoothly and soon after we heard a cry from the Quayside. "What you do'in there you daft old bugger"? and before we could say bowline, Tony was off for a pint with an old Morris Dancing friend. We too took to the streets and found "The George" pub with table and chairs outside in the sunshine to sit and watch the town life go by. Tony and friend caught up with us at the bar they had in mind had run out of ale!! It all worked out in our favour as we got a local rundown in Weymouth and its history from Tony's mate. Megs rustled up a quick stir fry for dinner and hallelujah Peter found Tesco's and stocked up on Green and Blacks before long, one block down.



April 15, Pete steered us away early and round Portland Bill with steady 4/5s which promised a good sail. We passed some beautiful coastline totally different to yesterdays. This was low lying and flat, flat, flat land, such a contrast. Crutch straps were an issue today, no names mentioned. But you do know you have reached a comfortable level when you ask a crew member to adjust your crutch strap. The wind pretty much died after we put the sails up so without that to tend to we motored and took advantage of the book work opportunity. The weather forecast did get one thing right, rain and thunderstorms. First time on the trip for us to put those oily's to good use. That lasted for about 5 minutes, just long enough for some to kit up and get on deck before it all finished. Visibility struggled to give us anything beyond the 1mile mark for a short time but that soon lifted and we were left with the misty, grey entrance in to what has arguably been our most impressive and characterful port so far. Dartmouth with its obvious charm invited us further up the river Dart passed all the houses perched in a grandstand fashion to the Dart Haven Marina where we were greeted by a casual 'Hi Chris'. Back in Chris' stomping grounds we took advantage of his local knowledge and heading out to the 'Cherub Inn', the oldest pub in Devon??? On leaving the pub we found another and decided on a late night light pizza snack and another drink for the swing of the door. Managed to catch one of the last ferry's back and in doing so also an education from watching how the ferry manoeuvred across the river using only one spring line. Every day is a school day.

April 16 Playing around on the Dart for the morning practicing picking up mooring buoys and reefing the sail. We had a cracking, leisurely sail deciding when to alter course towards Tor Bay only when tea's were finished. Priorities. More practice was called for and Chris felt the need to put us and our nerves to the test by manoeuvring purely under sail in and around the channel and its surrounding moored boats. What a great exercise in realising the capabilities of your crew and your boat. Our passage was impeded by a power boater who stopped to ask us 'is this Brixham or Dartmouth?'. This also in turn, boosted our confidence in our own navigation skills having known where we were. Being truthful fellow people of the water, we told them Brixham, even though the lesser evil in us had a brief thought of blurting out the other. Megs had the role of reversing Six Isles in through the best part of the marina to her berth. After a great day it was to have a sad ending as Chris was leaving us as his 'leg' had come to an end. Up to the office to see George for the first time since London and get acquainted with Brixham.

April 17 A welcomed 'day off' if we can award ourselves with that saying. Our day was filled with voluntary study, which we hope will hold us in good stead when it comes to the qualifying exams! The rest of the day was spent discovering Brixham and taking advantage of the laundry facilities to get some much needed washing done, as we were beginning to run out certain of items of clothing. Peter's family have arrived to stay in an apartment in Brixham to spend a few days with him, and they kindly invited us for a meal in the evening. Good home cooking, yes!

April 18 We were joined by six other participants when we attended our first study day, which was devoted to all aspects of the VHF radio handling including the various protocols to be used. Much of the morning was taken up by forming two groups in separate rooms and sending each other 'Mayday' calls. A lot of fun was had thinking up the various scenarios leading to our emergency, including, amongst others, being boarded by pirates. Importantly, by the end of the morning we all felt that we could handle the radio in an actual emergency. The rest of the day was spent handling 'non-emergency' radio traffic, such as calling up marinas to book a berth. We all left with our certificates of competence.

April 19 Day two of lectures familiarised us with handling and interpreting the boats Radar equipment.

April 20 First Aid on the boat was today's theme, and consisted of familiarising ourselves with the kits carried by every boat in the fleet and their use. We practised bandaging each other, and examining for potential injuries. This was followed by taking turns at putting each other in the recovery position. Finally we practiced chest compressions and mouth to mouth resuscitations on a dummy. As with other days much joviality abounded, including concern at not being able to use of 'electric shock' treatment on each other, but we each came away with the all important certificate.

April 21 Peter's 65th Birthday! I am sure he could have thought of better ways of spending it than dressing in shorts, tee shirt, waterproofs and a life-jacket, and jumping into a twelve foot deep swimming pool. So could we all; but the fact was that this was today's lesson. Having deployed our life-raft which grew from being a suitcase size box to a six person rubber raft with a canopy before our very eyes, we were taught the technique of how to scramble aboard from the water. Without this tuition I doubt that any of us would have managed to achieve this feat. However by the end of the morning we were not only able to board ourselves individually, but to pull an 'unconscious' ship-mate in as well. George played a hose-pipe on us for realism and it was great fun .....not!

April 22 Late start today 9.30 (and Peter was still late!). Back to sea, if only for the morning, where under George's experienced eye, we practised 'man-overboard' procedures whilst under sail. We each took it in turns to helm the boat for two or three attempts and we felt we had acquitted ourselves quite well. (I wonder what George thinks!) The wind had picked up by this stage and we found ourselves tacking in the channel again and sailing onto a mooring on which we swung for lunch in the sun. Some pontoon bashing on the events pontoon and before we knew it, it was time to wrap things up for the day.



Peter, Tony, Megan and Chris all arrived safely in Brixham

After successfully completing the following courses

SRC (VHF) Course  
Sea Survival  
First Aid  
Diesel Engine  
Radar

Six Isles finally left Brixham this afternoon, Monday 27 April, a bit of a false start on Saturday when one of the mainsail battens decided to start nosing its way out of the sail. With strong winds forecast Aubrey, the skipper, decided to re evaluate the situation and return to Brixham Saturday night. The sail was taken off the boat and with our repairer lunch time Sunday we picked it up early afternoon. The sail was bent on and off they set.

To Be Continued.....