

Allan Nicol - 1954 Channel Race

25 June, 1954

10.30 – With Richard ? travelled to Southampton on train

1200 – Met Michael Lock and Mr. Passmore (owner) on station. M^r. and M^{rs}. P. drove us 3 to Bumeldon on R. Hamble where THETA was lying. Met Michael Passmore (skipper) and sister Pam on board. Stowed kit.

1300 – Went en masse to neighbouring hostelry for lunch. Traditional pre-race meal given by M^r. P. Roger Curtis (mate) arrived.

1430 – Back on board. Instructed in the ways of engine by M^r. P. (I was engineer) and in rigging etc etc by Michael. Changed into sailing gear.



1625 – Slipped moorings and motored out of Hamble bound for Portsmouth. Raining. Wind moderate.

1700 – In Solent, hoisted sails and stopped motor. Wind freshening. Each took turns of the helm to get the “feel” of her. Practised reefing, sail changing etc.

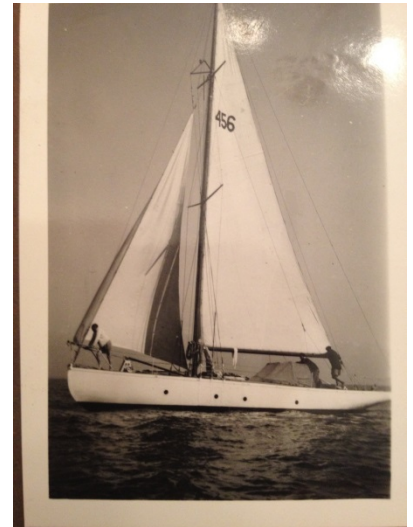
1800 – Arrived Portsmouth. Moored in outer harbour. Martin Godfrey came aboard – crew complete. Had supper (soup, ham and salad, fruit and cheese). Owner and Pam came aboard for coffee and to wish us bon voyage – obviously envious. Prepared sails etc for race.



2100 – Cast off.

2105 – First gun. Large gab (genoa) breaks out prematurely – chaos – in stays on the line with 30 secs to go (I was on the stop watch).

2115 – Second gun. Manage to get out of stays and were first across the line. Magnificent start. Watchers on shore think it very professional



apparently – little did they know.

2130 – Martin and I ordered below to turn in. Lay for a long time fighting nausea. Determined not to give in.

Midnight – Relieve watch on deck (Roger and Richard). Cook (Michael) has succumbed. [26-6-54] Strong wind dead off. Doing 8-9 knots. Really exhilarating. Large seas appearing from behind being caught in out stern light and disappearing forward. Wonderful phosphorescent bow wave. Steering very wearing as one must not gybe. We take it in turns at the helm – 1 hour on and 1 off throughout the watch. Take one sea in the cockpit. Much of it goes below into the skupper!

0400 – Off Beachy Head. Roger and Richard take over. Richard immediately gybes. Only due to presence of mind of Michael is sail and mast saved. Turn in and manage to sleep a bit.



0800 – Turn out. Roger makes cocoa – tastes like nectar or ambrosia (drink of gods!). Have rounded Royal Sovereign during our watch below. Now in mid-channel in company of 6 other yachts. Sailing close hauled on Starboard tack under full main and Genoa.

1000 – I'm on the helm when glancing up from compass note that "genny" (genoa) doesn't seem to be setting properly. Next sea she is split. Call skipper. Martin and he change the genny for staysail. When completed the 6 yachts escape out of sight. Obviously shouldn't have been carrying so much canvas. Michael seems unperturbed, though.



1200 – Came off watch. Michael and I have lunch of magnificent homemade Cornish pasties, the weight of which sends everyone else to the rail! Turn in and sleep them off. Can now sleep the whole of my watch off instead of just lying watching the sea push past the port hole. Cabin pretty wet by now and the skylight leaks a bit so we are shipping it green.

1600 – Feel in great form after 4 hours sleep. Now off French coast. Have caught up with Cohoe II. Joyrena and another boat too far off to identify. We have tea of coffee and cakes. While on watch one can continually nibble at barley, sugar raisins, chocolate, biscuits etc kept in a tin in easy reach in the cockpit. Theta now sailing herself with helm lashed.

1800 – Came off watch (dog watch of 2 hours).

2000 – Back on watch again. There was scarcely time to remove oilskins. It only takes about a minute to peel everything off and turn in but it's a very much harder job dressing in the cabin with its pitching and rolling. Supper of enormous ham sandwiches.

Are now beating down the French coast towards Le Havre. Magnificent sunset. "Red sky at night etc." Should be good to-morrow. Cohoe II standing in for coast. Wonder whether she's putting in at Deauville! No radio signals from buoy we have to round. Should be.

Eventually spot it against sunset – Flashing twice every 10 secs. Lovely bright star-light night. Very loathe to come off watch at 1200. Rounded buoy at 2330 approx.

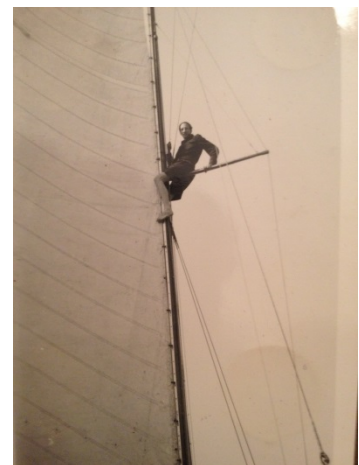
Midnight – Turn in. Now on port tack so my bunk is tilted the other way. Discover new [27-6-54] technique of wedging myself in.

0400 – Very "bog-eyed" as we turn out in the cold dawn. Soon sun appears over horizon. Now well ahead of Joyrena, Cohoe II. Can't understand it. Maybe they did put into Deauville. Discover racing flag and boat hook have walked off in the night. Wind moderated slightly but seas still quite big. Wished we still had genny as could carry her now. A lovely day – good breeze and sun. Perfect sailing. Discard oilskin trousers for first time while on deck. Immediately soaked!

0200 – Martin goes below to get some breakfast. Puts 12 eggs (scrambled) in sauce pan on stove. Opens grapefruit tin. Sudden gust deposits grapefruit mostly into saucepan. A dish not recommended but it no doubt helped to counteract scurvy!

0800 – Turn in. Pity to miss such a nice day but there's not room for us all in the cockpit especially as the "cook" is now up and taking interest. Anyway quite tired.

1200 – On watch again. England in sight. Can just make out the Nub at the entrance to the Solent. In company with Joyrena. Exhilarating sailing on a broad reach.



1310 – Round Nub, harden sheets. Joyrena now catches up. Everyone on deck as seas now lee. I prepare class flags and new masthead racing flag for crossing line. Joyrena nearly within hailing distance.

1430 – Michael takes helm and does some quick tacks while Joyrena keeps on her present course. We gain considerable lead.

1446 – Sudden calm. Prepare to hoist light jib in place of staysail. Only ¼ mile to go. Tremendous squall of hail descends. Race forward but ends as soon as it starts. Change sails as no other looks imminent. Another squall and the light jib is in ribbons. Hoist staysail. Squall lines and wind remain light.



1625 – Eventually cross finishing line between forts. A good 20 min in front of Joyrena.

1700 – Pull up mooring off Royal Yacht Squadron at South Sea. Put Martin and Richard ashore to catch train. Drinks in R.Y.S. bar. Discover we may have won our class and that many yachts have returned via Fashound (all crews seasick) Marabu (de-masted) etc.

1900 – Sail for Hamble. Drying sails.

1930 – Main and staysail now dry. Start another and stow sails. Work hard to get boat shipshape again.

2200 – Back at Bumeldon. Michael and Roger ashore to phone M^r. P. I get supper with cook's assistant (bit of a dead loss, that chap!).



Midnight – Turn in. Bunk not nearly as comfortable when the boat is upright.

0600 – Turn out, pack up. Go ashore.

0735 – Catch train at Bumeldon for London.