

# Portishead Cruising Club's

## 'Cruise in Company' to Gloucester Docks

### Skippers Notes & Safety Information 2014

Firstly welcome to this event, the first organised 'cruise' of the PCC calendar.

These notes contain Safety information which you should familiarise yourself with. Please take a few minutes to read through it. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me ( Derek Estcourt at [derek.estcourt@btinternet.com](mailto:derek.estcourt@btinternet.com) , tel. 01275 463264 or 0791 7775051).

This event is a 'cruise in company' organised by Portishead Cruising Club. A 'cruise in company' is essentially a group of individual boats all of which have a common destination. As such the **responsibility for the safety of each boat and its crew remains that of the skipper at all times**, and it is the skipper who is responsible for the decision to take to sea. No guarantees are given by the Portishead Cruising Club for the suitability of or the safe passage of any vessel. As is established maritime practice and a requirement of Solas V each skipper should prepare their own passage plan, which should include contingency planning. The skipper is also responsible for ensuring the sea worthiness of their vessel and that adequate navigational equipment is carried. There are a number of hazards which are exaggerated due to the extreme tides in the Severn Estuary. PCC recommends that each skipper should have existing experience of a passage between Portishead and Sharpness (and vice versa) so that they are more able to prepare their plan.

Due to the nature of the Severn Estuary between Portishead and Sharpness the weather has a marked effect on the sea conditions.

These notes are given in good faith to help direct you in the preparation of your passage plan. They are based on previous 'cruises-in-company'. However no guarantee is made that the information herein is accurate, or safe to act upon. Nothing in these notes absolves the skipper from any of his/her responsibility.

### Friday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2014 - Avonmouth to Sharpness

**It is recommended that you read the “Guidance notes for small craft” and the “Guide to Safe Navigation” on the <http://www.gloucesterharbourtrustees.org.uk/marinesafety.shtml> website. The Gloucester Harbour Trustees area of responsibility extends down to Deny Island.**

Arrive at Sharpness between 30 minutes-1hour before HW (09.43 BST). This will allow our boats to be locked in before the arrival of any commercial traffic (which should be given priority). Await signal on CH13 to enter.

The harbour master at Sharpness has indicated that he would prefer all radio traffic to take place on VHF CH13 (Sharpness Radio), to ensure everyone is monitoring that channel.

According to the Harbour Master, one place where incidents occur is at 'Black Rock' near Berkley Power Station. The rock is about four metres lower than the nearby sand bank, however people see the rock on the chart and in avoiding it, hit the sand.

Before getting to the sea lock at Sharpness you pass through the Basin. In this basin is a pontoon and there are four 'knuckles' to moor against whilst waiting for the second lock. If you are waiting in the basin and all mooring space is taken please motor anti-clockwise around the basin. When mooring in the basin remember that it is tidal and that any mooring ropes should be monitored at all times to prevent the boat being hung up or held down by the tide.

For health and safety reasons crew will not be allowed to embark or disembark boats whilst the boats are in the sea basin. Crew transfer must be undertaken in the lock once a level has been achieved, or on the canal.

British Waterways Keys for their facilities are available to order from the BWW website for about £5. These can be used on any British Waterways canal side facilities.

## **Friday Evening**

We have been generously invited to use the Gloucester Yacht Club as a base for the weekend and it will be open for drinks on Friday afternoon and evening.

## **Saturday**

Gloucester Yacht Club will be open most of the day from early lunchtime onwards. Crews usually eat at a restaurant in town on Saturday evening before socialising at Gloucester Yacht Club.

Showers are available adjacent to the British Waterways office, with use of a key.

## **Sunday**

Leave Gloucester. There is no set time to leave although boats are requested to travel in groups of 6-8 to relieve pressure on bridge opening. Boats should ensure they are sufficiently close to Sharpness to allow passage through the High and Low Bridges at the entrance to Sharpness Docks on Monday morning.

## **Monday**

Sharpness Docks require that all vessels need to allow arrival at Sharpness two hours before HW in order to allow time to secure all boats in the lock/basin prior to any commercial shipping enter the lock. Please make sure that you are ready to pass through the High and Low bridges when they are opened for us to proceed into the lock/basin as they are the only vehicular route across the canal in the area of the docks and therefore they shall only be opened for a minimum period of time by the Sharpness docks staff. We will be locked into the basin to await the ebb. Crews joining, should do so on the canal as with limited time available there may not be the opportunity to transfer crews in the lock, and as previously stated crew changes in the sea basin contravene the docks health and safety rules.

The ability for Portishead Marina to lock boats is limited. We recommend the faster vessels heading for Portishead make best speed so that they can be locked through prior to the main flotilla arriving. If you are not able to make the last lock of the morning tide there is only a few hours wait until the first lock of the next tide. Please be prepared for the delay'.

In the case of bad weather, boats not able to leave Sharpness are permitted to be moored without additional charge on the canal until the next reasonable opportunity to lock out occurs.

## **General Notes**

The Gloucester/Sharpness canal is 16miles long and has ten swing bridges. We have been asked not to travel in groups of more than ten boats. Each bridge has a simplified 'traffic light', only proceed through the bridge when the green light is showing. When the bridge opens vessels coming the other way may be signalled to proceed first. With a tail wind it can be difficult to hold your position whilst waiting so please allow adequate space. Some of the bridges may be swung by hand and may not be able to open safely in any wind.

**Stopping off places.** There are limited number of places with enough depth to get alongside. Some of the most popular ones are:

- Sharpness above High Level Bridge on western side (on return route to wait for High level bridge)
- Slimbridge (Patch Bridge) Pub
- Frampton on Severn (south of Frethern Bridge, pub)
- Saul Junction (café and showers)

Remember to avoid setting mooring lines across the towpath.

**Essential Bridge etiquette** -we've been especially asked to note the following this year

- **Await the green light before starting to go through.** For every ones safety please obey the signals and don't go before bridge fully opened and green light shows. We've been warned that transgressions will be followed up this year.
- **Bridge keepers will wait until a group of 6 or 8 boats has formed before opening,** depending on traffic, so leave enough manoeuvring space and remember you may need to allow craft through from the other direction first!
- **High Orchard Bridge** – a new(ish) bridge which doesn't appear yet on the British Waterways Boating Guide. Just before Llanthony Bridge (the final Bridge into Gloucester Docks), High Orchard is a lifting Bridge which now provides the main road bridge across the canal. Be prepared to wait for traffic to clear (up to 20-30 mins) or for a group of boats to gather before it is opened.
- **Let another boat know if you are stopping.** BW try to help us by keeping note of which boats go through each bridge so that they can pass on the info to the next bridge, allowing them to make sure everyone in a particular group gets through the same bridge swing. They have asked that the lead boat in a group be nominated to let the bridge keepers know if any boats have stopped off en-route so the swing does not need to be held up unnecessarily.

The bridge keepers can be contacted by phone to request a bridge swing. The phone numbers are printed in the 'Boaters Guides' (which you can download from the Waterscape website [Boaters guide](#) (choose Gloucester and Sharpness Canal))

If you want to stop off at one of the pubs for lunch we recommend that you make a reservation. These pubs can get busy at weekends at the best of times, and especially so on a bank holiday weekend in fine weather.

In Gloucester Docks avoid mooring across the safety ladders in the quay walls.

On the canal itself do not moor more than two boats deep (one for catamarans) as there is the possibility that there will be a large vessel moving on the canal. At the edges of the canal the depth may only be just over one metre. If mooring do not pass lines over the towpath. Mooring pins are required.

For routine ship-to-ship communications, the following channels have been designated in UK waters. Channels 6, 8, 72 and 77. We recommend for this cruise to use VHF Channel 77

Avonmouth Radio VHF channel 12 (calling and traffic), manned 24hrs  
 Sharpness Radio VHF channel 13 (07774 226143), normally manned from 5hrs before until 1hr after H.W.  
 Portishead Quays Marina VHF channel 80 Telephone : 01275 841941

PCC group MMSI number 023 200 069

### **Dos and Don'ts**

**Don't use the sea toilets on the canal.** There are a number of toilets along the canal, accessible by BW key. Alternatively call in at one of the Pubs along the way.

Avoid using tenders and inflatable dinghies in Gloucester Dock.

Please place bagged rubbish in the commercial 'wheelie' bins and not the small public litter bins. There are two 'wheelie' bins in Gloucester dock and a number of them along the canal.

# Important Safety Information

## Legal Responsibility

**It is a fundamental principle of maritime law, that the skipper is responsible for the safety of his/her vessel and crew. The skipper has the responsibility to decide whether to start, continue or stop an event, in the light of his or her competence, the ability of the crew, and the suitability of the craft for the conditions likely to be encountered. Vessels are encouraged to buddy up with like vessels to give assistance to each other should it be required after a PAN PAN or MAYDAY has been transmitted but be aware that the assisting boat could themselves be at risk.**

The organisers accept no liability for any loss, damage, death or personal injury howsoever caused to the owner, skipper or crew, as a result of their participation in this event.

## Avonmouth to Sharpness

The passage from Avonmouth to Sharpness, is subject to unusually fast tides, a high number of navigational hazards, shoaling sands and patches of breaking waves all of which increase the likelihood of grounding. It should only be undertaken by a suitable craft with a competent skipper. Each boat is advised to 'buddy' up with a boat of similar size, and be prepared to give or receive a tow. However if it is not safe, you are advised to contact the emergency services rather than endanger your or any other vessel. Be prepared to sail out of danger or call for assistance to a local boat for towing or both should the engine not perform perfectly. Your passage plan shall take into account any shallows, obstacles and passage markers/lights as a minimum.

## Shipping

Between Portishead and Sharpness shipping is severely constrained by the channel and in its ability to avoid smaller vessels, especially those vessels are in a flotilla. With their local knowledge the pilots sometimes will deviate from the marked channel. If you are in doubt of the intention of any ship please call them or Sharpness on VHF channel 13 for advice.

## Plan your passage to Sharpness

Under the SOLAS V regulations the skipper is obliged to undertake a passage plan.

## Cruising in company

Although the participants generally will follow the anticipated passage, there will be times when that is not the case. When in company, the close proximity of other boats requires a good lookout at all times and that the helm is prepared to respond quickly.

## Be prepared for engine failure

The passage from Avonmouth to Sharpness is typically undertaken using engine. However it is good practice to have your sails and anchor ready to deploy quickly in case of engine failure. As this is the first organised cruise of the season after the winter layover there is an increased chance of engine failure. At the first signs of problems with your engine you are advised to alert other nearby boats (if they are in a position to and are willing to stand by) or the coastguard.

## VHF/DSC

All vessels should be fitted with a Marine VHF radio and have the required licenses to use it. A listening watch should be kept on VHF channel 13 at all times above the Second Severn Crossing and all flotilla traffic should be conducted on this channel whilst in tidal waters so that all parties are aware of any situation. If you have a DSC number please forward it on to the organisers. PCC has a 'Group MMSI' number (023 200 069) which allows one call to alert all the DSC sets. If you have the facility please enter this number into your set. Also prior to making a call which is intended for all the participants of the cruise please call using the Group number.

## Anchoring

Anchoring in a fast flowing tide is hazardous. An anchor warp over the side of a boat can heel or roll the boat when the anchor bites, even with the anchor warp in the bow roller, the bow will be pulled downwards. The dangers of deploying an anchor in strong currents/tides is dangerous ensure that the speed over the ground is nil when deploying the anchor and that the anchor when it bites can cause boats to oscillate about the anchor or even be pulled under the water, remember Safety First.

## First Aid

There are First Aiders in the group should the skipper not be able to cope with the situation, it is highly

recommended that all boats have someone on board who has a First Aid qualification, and all vessels shall carry a first aid kit. All situations which are beyond first aid the skipper shall contact the emergency services via the coast guard.

#### Going aground

Should any vessel go aground they should advise the other vessels in the company and the Coast Guard to render assistance before attempting to free themselves.

#### Man Overboard

At this time of year the water is at its coldest. With the fast flowing tides above Avonmouth a 'Man Overboard' may be difficult to locate. In addition early morning decks may be covered with frost, and sudden choppy conditions can increase the risk of falling. Please instruct your crew of the additional risk and be prepared for such an incident. Life jackets shall be worn at all times by all persons on board. In the hours of darkness all persons shall wear life lines when on deck and in the cockpit.

#### Leptospirosis & Weil's Disease

(1) Unlike tap water, the water in canals, rivers and reservoirs is untreated and micro-organisms are naturally present. However although the risk of contracting illness (including the much publicised but rare condition Weil's Disease) is extremely small, sensible precautions should be taken as follows:

- Avoid full immersion in the water
- Cover all cuts and abrasions with waterproof dressings before contact with the water.
- Wash all exposed skin after contact with water and before eating.
- Do not put wet ropes, fishing lines or other objects in your mouth.

(2) Should any illness occur within 2 weeks of contact, you should seek medical advice and inform your doctor you have been in contact with untreated water.

#### Mooring on the Towpath

You should provide your vessel with a pair of mooring pins and a mallet to secure the vessel when stopped. Keep the towpath clear and avoid placing ropes or other obstacles across it, these may cause obstruction or injury. The maximum of three boats shall raft within the canal as a precaution should fire occur a boat with the fire can extract themselves more easily. Please be aware that deep keel boats may not be able to moor up along side the canal bank thus impede passing traffic.

#### Life Jackets

Where appropriate life jackets must be worn at all times.

#### Poor Visibility

The Severn estuary closely bounded by land, experiences mist and fog more frequently than other locations in the Bristol Channel. Please consider this when making your passage plan.

#### Portishead Hole

Although a recognised place to await the tide, Portishead hole should only be used with local knowledge. It is exposed to any winds with North in them. If you do anchor or take the ground at Portishead do not impede the fairway into the Marina and also the Avonmouth shipping channel just offshore. If anchoring, allow enough scope to copy with the extreme tidal range. With the tides it is recommended that an 'anchor watch' be maintained. Should the skipper wish to anchor for a prolonged period they should do so having advised Bristol VTS and Portishead Marina and taken into account the weather reports as a minimum.

#### The River Avon

Boats awaiting the tide/at anchor in the River Avon should be aware that on occasions there are some large vessels which navigate the river, and which would be restricted in their ability to manoeuvre. In addition the river can become very shallow at low water. If you do anchor in the river advise Bristol VTS and Bristol Docks (cumberland basin) and show the appropriate lights/dayshapes.

#### Sharpness Entrance

When approaching Sharpness please listen out on the VHF for any directions on entering. If you are carried by the tide past the entrance at Sharpness you may not be able to make progress against the tide and it may not be possible to delay the lock to wait for you. You are advised to approach Sharpness using the South side of the channel, however avoid being in a position where you may be pushed against the piers.

At Sharpness boats entering the basin from the sea will pass between two lattice work piers. These piers allow

the tide to flow through them. As a vessel passes between the two piers, it will be carried by the tide. There is a risk of being pinned against a pier, and subsequently rolled by the action of the tide on the keel. Do not attempt to pass between the piers without a reliable engine, and be prepared to wait until slack water, return to Avonmouth or make landfall elsewhere. If you have not previously entered between the piers you may consider standing by (if the tide allows) and gain some knowledge by watching others enter. If you are being towed be aware that your boat will be taken by the tide and you could put the towing vessel at risk should you not take appropriate action to compensate for the tide.

When leaving Sharpness on the return journey, if you leave before high water you are advised not to put your vessel where it will be carried onto the piers or any other danger if the engine fails. It is seldom worth leaving Sharpness much before high water due to the rapid incoming tide which will severely slow your progress. Should the weather conditions (poor weather/visibility) upon leaving the Docks not be acceptable to the skipper the skipper may elect to stay in the canal until the conditions are favourable for leaving and contact British Waterways to make further arrangements.

### **Sharpness Basin / Risk tied up boats.**

If you are moored up in Sharpness Basin, ensure that your mooring ropes can be readily released to accommodate any change in water height. There are limited numbers of moorings available in the basin. Be prepared to raft alongside other vessels. If there is no space to moor, please slowly motor anti-clockwise around the basin. When the basin is being filled there will be currents generated by the action of the sluices, either keep your engine running in case it is required or have it ready to start. The lock staff should be able to advise you on where to moor. Skippers shall listen to VHF Channel 13 to receive advice from Sharpness Docks as to what action to take if there is a problem within the lock.

There are no fences around the basin or the docks, for safety reasons do not allow your crew to walk around the dock.

When the basin/lock is filled level with the canal the edges of the enclosing walls will be near the waterline where it can be difficult to fender off, especially when rafted up and in windy conditions.

### **Rafting Up**

Whilst on the canal do not raft up more than three boats deep, to reduce the fire risk. Do not impede the fairway when moored up. When in Sharpness basin, boats may be rafted up to five deep, as the skipper and crew will be on board all skippers shall ensure that the crews shall be alert to the dangers of fire in addition to the usual duties of fending off for safety.

### **Canal Safety**

**For your safety and enjoyment of the canal it is necessary that you read the following information.**

Please read the attached link for Canal information <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/notices/results/page/1?waterways%5B%5D=94&region=-1&datefrom=&dateto=&Search=Search>

The British Waterways Boaters handbook can be found on this link

<http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/navigating-the-waterways/boat-handling>

Please be aware that rowing boats are a problem on the canal as they require a wide berth due to the width of oars and do not go in the way that the rower is looking, have an audible horn/alarm to use in these circumstances to make other users aware of your presence.

Please ensure that when mooring that your mooring lines do NOT create a tripping hazard for other toe path users.

Please be aware that the depth of the canal varies and sometimes single keel boats cannot always moor up and will need to raft up to smaller/multi keeled boats, in this case please be aware that you do NOT impede the use of the canal by other users when rafting up.

### **Portishead Marina**

There may be some congestion at Portishead marina as boats return from Sharpness on Monday morning. Please call the Marina (VHF ch80) before entering the marina approaches for advice and be aware of the weather conditions especially if the wind is from the North.

### **Gloucester Docks**

Around the quayside at Gloucester there are number of trip hazards, which add to the risk of falling in to the dock. The water will be cold and therefore the risk is high. Advise your crew to be very careful around the dock edge, especially at night. Please be especially vigilant and assist any participant to this event who may have been drinking alcohol.

### **Electrical Shock**

Where shore power is made available, only suitably protected electrical appliances should be used, and any shore lead should be fit for purpose.

### **Fire**

In close proximity with other boats fire can spread. If you discover a fire at any time raise the alarm, especially to any neighbouring boats. Each vessel is advised to carry a least one fire extinguisher and raft out to the maximum of three boats.

### **Weather.**

It's the skippers responsibility to be aware of the weather reports and what actions to take should the weather deteriorate from that forecast, be prepared to take action deviating from the passage planned safely.

This document was prepared on behalf of  
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