

Nowhere Near The Edge of Fear, by Nick Watt: An Article for 'Join the Club' in WaterCraft Magazine

Members who take WaterCraft magazine will be aware of the feature 'Join the Club'. News of DCA activities will appear there regularly from now on, as Nick Watt has taken on the rôle of DCA Public Relations Officer (which means we need a new Exhibitions Officer, by the way!) and he will be making sure that we are represented. Nick has written the first bulletin for it, printed below for the benefit of those who do not buy WaterCraft, but he and I hope that other members will help out and volunteer material regularly in the future. Members' photographs will also be important – we will need images of happy people (ideally from a wide age range) disporting themselves in boats (preferably sailing). His contact details are of course to be found on page 2. Note that Nick's piece may have been edited down to fit by the time it appears if space is at a premium (they're not all as easy-going as me) –Ed

I have just spent an interesting three days at Beale Park talking to people about dinghy cruising when they visited our pontoon. 'What is dinghy cruising?' was the most common question, along with the statement 'We thought people just raced in dinghies.' Those who had some idea usually had a mental image of bearded middle-aged men battling the elements on epic voyages ... 'We've read about Frank Dye ...'

Frank, who died in May, was a young man when he made his famous voyages to Iceland and Norway in his Wayfarer (nor was he bearded until much later in life). He was member No. 4 of the Dinghy Cruising Association and represents perhaps one end of the spectrum of dinghy cruising, where:

'Offshore cruising in an open boat can be hard, cold, wet, lonely and occasionally miserable, but it is exhilarating too. To take an open dinghy across a hundred miles of sea, taking weather as it comes; to know that you have only yourself and your mate to rely on in an emergency; to see the beauty of dawn creep across the ever-restless and dangerous ocean; to make a safe landfall – is wonderful and all of these things develop a self-reliance that is missing from the modern, mechanical, safety-conscious civilised world.' (Frank and Margaret Dye, 'Ocean Crossing Wayfarer', Adlard Coles Nautical, 2nd edition, 2006)

He was a modest and formidably talented sailor; a man to inspire us all, but not necessarily to emulate. One has only to read either 'Ocean Crossing Wayfarer' or 'Sailing to the Edge of Fear' to realise that very few of us have his skill, capacity for endurance, or vision.

At the other end of the dinghy cruising spectrum lie the hundreds of us who take out a small boat for a day sail with no more object than to potter in the evening, a reach around to the next-door cove for a picnic, or a minor voyage of exploration to the furthest creek of an estuary. Otherwise known as 'gunkholing' to our American readers, it can provide some of the most pleasurable experiences it is possible to have in a small boat.



Anchorage on the West Coast of Scotland, © John M X Hughes

'I stuff one more bag under the foredeck then step aboard myself, pushing off from the stony beach as I do, trying to make it look like a smooth and practised manoeuvre and as though I know what I'm doing, conscious of the gaze of a dozen people waiting for the foot-passenger ferry on the jetty above me. Well, I do know what I'm doing: I'm going to sail with my family across to Lismore, and there is no wind and the tide has turned against us. The boat carries way with the extra load, fortunately clears the end of the jetty and with the sails just holding shape we slowly glide out into the Lynn of Lorn and start to drift with the ebb leaving Port Appin astern. It's a warm sunny day and we've plenty of lunch; we'll just enjoy the scenery until the tide turns or the breeze comes up.'

'We could sail to the broch. It's less than three miles - look, you can see it on top of the hill!' (DCA Bulletin 190 – article by John MX Hughes)

In the middle of the spectrum lie those who voyage a little further than that creek or cove and who are prepared to camp overnight – either ashore or at anchor in their boat – in the creek or cove beyond, before either returning or going further still. The trick lies in the ability to do this skilfully and in safety. Above all (including the obvious factors of seamanship and navigational skills), this entails a clear understanding of the strengths and limitations of the boat and her crew and the skipper's acceptance of responsibility for them and his own actions. Not so very different from



DCA members cruising in company in the Swedish Archipelago

© Keith Muscott/DCA

other forms of boating, you say? Agreed, but the rewards of voyaging into coastal areas where large boats cannot venture and doing so without most of the modern aids that skippers of larger, modern yachts have to hand are peace, wildlife, scenery and a massive (if quietly enjoyed) sense of personal achievement. That achievement often appears to be on a smaller scale – but then so are our boats. To quote Frank Dye again:

'One of the nicest things about having a small open boat ... on a trailer is that you can drive off and be sailing

anywhere in the country within 24 hours. Catch a ferry to France. You can't do that in a heavy keelboat.' (Interview by Johnny Adams of the DCA)

So, if one evening you are sitting pint in hand outside a remote waterside pub way, way up in the furthest reaches of an estuary and you see a small boat ghosting past under sail, oar or scull – take a moment to watch her and wonder how far her crew have come in such a diminutive craft; it may be further than you imagine. Watch them as they sling a tent over the boom having anchored or moored and see the lamplight flicker as supper is cooked and – as you drain the last of your glass – contemplate your own larger vessel (if you are so blessed) condemned to marina or mooring for lack of crew. You may be able to voyage further in her, but that little boat will be experiencing just as much adventure – and probably more often – as you. If, on the other hand, you are getting tired of the rush of racing around the marks in your dinghy, why not use her to try a different sort of challenge ?

Why not find out more about the Dinghy Cruising Association by visiting us at www.dca.uk.com or joining our international forum 'Openboat' at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/openboat/> ? NW

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