

# Capsizing the Wanderer

By Mike Harrington, with text added by Jennifer Heney and Keith Muscott

**Account#1, Jennifer Heney:**  
Ullswater, September 7-9, 2018

It was not a stroll in the park with light winds, but a real battle with the elements. I know you will realise this now via the forum and the rally report. It was a seriously challenging weekend and I was completely exhausted at the end of it! You couldn't switch off for a second on the helm. One gust on Saturday pushed us over for a few seconds, resulting in water coming over the gunwale and convincing Janice she was about to go for a swim. It was even wilder on the Sunday when Mike capsized. The wind changed direction constantly, making sailing to windward difficult, but when we turned onto a run to come back we were flying! JH

Jennifer, Janice and Leonie were in the Falmouth Bass Boat *Jonathan Seagull*, which has exactly the same hull dimensions, shape and ballast as *Tuluk*, whose Arctic adventure is printed on page 26 of this journal. Jennifer is an experienced and serious sailor and has owned *Jonathan Seagull* for years.

**Account#2, Mike Harrington:**  
Ullswater, September 7-9, 2018

I was sailing with David Spensley, who helmed, and as we entered Howtown Bay the wind was strong and coming from all directions. Sailing became challenging. As we tacked a gust caught *Arion* and over she went, turning turtle, with one ferry preparing to leave and one waiting to enter the bay: we were holding up their progress.

With David and myself in the cold water, righting the boat was a priority, but as the boat was well loaded it was difficult to raise. On lifting the boat upright we found

## The Boat (Keith Muscott)

According to *Yachts and Yachting*, the Wanderer is '...perhaps the best general purpose dinghy'. Elsewhere, other authorities have spoken of its 'high intrinsic stability'. Much is made of the original having been designed by Ian Proctor to a brief presented by Margaret Dye 'who wanted a lighter dinghy than the Wayfarer she had sailed with her husband Frank.'

Margaret said she liked the result, but finally migrated to a Gull Spirit.

We should remember that Ian Proctor, Jack Holt, Ian Howlett and others were keen racers – which was partly why they were brilliant designers – and they had reputations to maintain in the racing world. In other words, they would rather have had their bare feet held to a fire than draw a slow boat.

The Wanderer went into production in 1981 and was not an unqualified success. Masthead buoyancy appeared, secured in the top of the mainsail. Much later, a serious rethink about the distribution of hull buoyancy led to the MD modification, which lowered the floating freeboard of the hull after a 90° capsize, making recovery easier and reducing its tendency to turn turtle. Instead of the wooden centreboard a steel centreplate weighing 38.5kg / 85lbs was approved for those who felt it would be helpful.

Ex-DCA member Mike Pollard began his long distance adventuring by sailing the family Wanderer solo across the Irish Sea to Dun Laoghaire, but he had a 9 stones / 126lbs / 57kg steel centreplate made first, and adopted a cockpit sole helming position. This was the man who later did the same crossing – and others – under sail in an inflatable Tinker Traveller.

When Hartley Laminates took over the Wanderer licence, Phil Morrison redesigned the deck plug, modernising the appearance and allowing the hull to self-drain through transom flaps. In any boat with a stern locker – including the Wayfarer – serious thought has to be given to how the boat drains after becoming swamped. In my opinion whatever solution is chosen, its efficiency should equate to having twin circular 4-inch open hatches in the transom, as per the Enterprise and racing GP14. The latest Mk IV Wayfarer has a raised cockpit sole which is self-draining, but after a capsize it takes far too long to get rid of the residual water that pools on the fore part of the sole and is sufficiently weighty to affect handling. I speak from personal experience. Past marques of the Wayfarer were swamped when left on moorings. When I re-read Richard Gooderick's *Last Tack at the Needles* I was reminded uncomfortably of Mike's Wanderer experiences in 2018.

that the foresail was still cleated and slowly the boat sailed away with David holding onto it and me swimming as well as I could with my buoyancy aid under my chin.

All ended well with us landing on a stony beach, both on board, with the boat full of water. My concern then was the cold, so the stove came out, which lit, thank goodness, despite being wet, and we brewed up and bailed out. Soon after, Chris and Celia in their Deben Lugger, Margaret and Frank in *Grace* and Jennifer, Leonie and Janice in

*Jonathan Seagull* arrived. They were prepared with dry clothes and were willing to share them with us, We were grateful to them and glad to be warm again.

The trip back to Ullswater Yacht Club was just as exciting. We decided, along with Frank and Margaret, to sail under Genoa alone with the strong wind behind us. As we left the bay, with David on the helm, the wind blew harder until we decided to drop the Genoa and sail with bare poles only.

Simon recorded a speed of 3 knots in his Enterprise sailing with poles only, what a wind! MH



*(Photograph left: Arion being helmed by David Spensley, Mike Harrington crewing, not long before the capsize on Ullswater.)*

**Account#3,  
Mike Harrington:  
Derwent Water,  
October 6-7**

...In all seriousness it was a frightening experience. Saturday provided a lovely day for sailing with pleasant winds and drinking dark beers with Chris Lavender whilst beached next to a park. Sunday morning started well with me sailing on my own as Anne-Marie decided to go walking.

The winds started slightly stronger than Saturday but nothing drastic, so with full main and Genoa raised, off I sailed.

Within about 10 minutes the first gust came and I reefed on the water. After being hit by another gust I decided to furl the Genoa and sail under reefed main only. By now the gusts were coming thick and fast but I felt confident as I continued to sail, managing to cope with whatever they brought.

When I reached St Herberts Island in the middle of Derwent Water I was hit by another big and prolonged gust but still managed to hold my own – that is, until another stronger gust came and over my boat went.

I have rerun this series of events in my head so many times since to try and work out if it was the strength of the gust or was I at fault. I have come to the conclusion it was a bit of both.

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“ The Wanderer has been given RYA – Recreational Craft Designation Category ‘C’ with a crew limit of between 1 and 4, in accordance with ISO –12217–3. This category is considered to render it suitable for use in waves up to 2.0m significant height and a typical steady wind of Beaufort Force 6 ” From: Wanderer.org.uk

The Wanderer was not completely sorted and bailed out while afloat at Ullswater, but was wrestled ashore beforehand. Also significant was the *instant* full 180° capsize. David Spensley held on to the boat when it sailed off under cleated jib; was this the reason it did not immediately turn turtle again after being raised?

David was helming when it capsized, and he is very experienced and competent. We have sailed together in Sweden and elsewhere, and he has his own Wanderer. To my knowledge he has capsized that only once, years ago on Coniston Water with his wife Margaret, when they were caught by a heavy gust with little room to manoeuvre in the mouth of the river that drains the lake.

Mike, owner of *Arion*, has just received the Naylor Noggin with Chris Lavender for their cruise around the Kyles of Bute in the Wayfarer *Ben Gunn*.



Maybe I was slightly too far off the wind with main pulled in too tightly at the moment the gust hit, I also think with only me on board there was not enough weight in the boat.

However, I was in the water wearing my normal non-waterproof clothes, no dry suit. I had left that back at the marina which of course turned out to be bad planning. At this point I was not cold due to all the adrenalin. The boat turned over 180° so the centreboard was pointing towards the sky. After hauling myself from the water onto the smooth surface of the boat I was able to then pull the boat so it was flat in the water using the centreboard. I then climbed onto the centreboard and righted the boat. As I climbed aboard another gust took it over – back to square one.

I attempted to right the boat four times, and each time another gust turned it over. At this point a local farmer arrived in his motorboat and kindly stayed just to give me moral support, which was needed, as after trying to board twice I was shattered.

Next, John Sharpe arrived to help as well as Simon, who

jumped into the water wearing a wet suit but soon got back in his boat due to the cold. Next to arrive was David Bone, who very kindly took me back to the Marina while the others sorted my boat out.

By this time I was starting to suffer from early stage hypothermia, shaking, with my legs starting to cramp. Next stop for me the shower and cups of tea to warm me up. I had by this time been in the water for I think over 20 minutes. I tried to right the boat four times.

Looking at the pictures Anne-Marie took whilst all this was going on, there were some significant waves and people viewing from the shore. I am not sure which of them alerted Derwent Water Marina but they sent out a RIB; I think it towed my boat back after it was righted.

Obviously I have a lot of people to thank regarding this event, which for me was quite frightening. I remember thinking at one stage, after taking a mouthful of water from the lake, that this situation was getting serious for me.

After everything had calmed down, the owner of the marina

virtually stripped my outboard to check it, dry it and make sure all was fine. He must have spent over 45 minutes doing it and all he wanted in return was a donation towards mountain rescue. The owner of the marina – and obviously a very kind person.

I met the farmer who was the first to help me later that afternoon as he had picked up some of the stuff floating from my boat, so I was able to thank him.

What an afternoon, what kind people, what an experience!

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(At Derwent Water, I lost the lid to the Wanderer's stern locker. My boat is about 20 - 25 years old and the boat has changed since then; the new lids do not fit the older boats. Can anyone help? MH)

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**Keith Muscott:** I have enjoyed daysailing a Wanderer, while always sensing that it needed constant close attention, judging it to be tender. Perhaps that is more or less true of all unballasted dinghies in a breeze. But what is the Wanderer? Daysailer yes, cruiser no? That would be ironic, considering she was designed to be the latter. (But see p38.) KM



Ullswater: (left to right) Mike Harrington, David Spensley, Tony Nield  
– with Mike's Wanderer, Arion