



Small pirogue doubling as an altar in the chapel

boat trip! On the cross-country march I positioned myself behind the lead hunter, who was carrying our food in a heavy pack. Occasionally he reached out and gave me fruit I had not noticed. Then suddenly he stopped and whispered 'tigre'. All I saw was a big cat's bum slinking into cover. Was it a rare jaguar? I judged it too large for a cougar. Mid-

way on our cross-country trek we spent the night in a large hut. This one was at ground level with its sides fenced in as a protection against predators. We were warned not to go out at night, and the two hunters slept at the entrance with shotguns and machetes at hand. In the morning a further march took us to another river where other pirogues awaited to take us back to a road.

On our overland journey back to Quito we stopped off at the Jumnadi caves. Here we stripped down to bathing costumes, were given candles to carry, and led deep underground. There were the usual stalactites, stalagmites and water-worn formations, but at the deepest point we had to swim across an underground river, each carrying his/her candle in one hand! It was only about a ten-yard swim, but our only guide in the blackness was the candles bobbing in the water ahead. Well, it was advertised as an adventure holiday! *LW*

The Gull ~ The Perfect Boat For Me by Chris Abela

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Just the other day I was working on the 12th story of a tower block that directly overlooked the reservoir where I first launched my Gull dinghy *Aurora* nearly 9 years ago. This prompted me to write a few words about this excellent little boat and what I have learnt about her since.

On completion of an RYA Day Skipper course I had learnt to sail theoretically, but I was daunted by the thought of yacht ownership. It seemed like a world that was more about money and sailing club dinner dances than sailing itself. Almost as if golfers had taken to the water and brought their elitism with them. With my new-found love of sailing I intended to be on the water actually getting wet (and sometimes dirty) in an attempt to hone my growing skills. I'd done some dinghy sailing years before but it wasn't until I discovered the DCA that I realised there was more to this sport than racing around a gravel pit in circles. Although I must confess, I have also become a keen racer in the last few years.

Our first boat was an old and rather shabby wooden Heron dinghy that my partner and I took to Ullswater for 2 weeks of intensive sailing cum capsizing practice. But after 6 months of devoted ownership Heron 97 left us for a better home.

What we needed was a boat that would be easy to launch, retrieve and sail single-handed but had room for at least two adult crew. When I first saw a Gull dinghy at the Earls Court Boat Show I knew she was the perfect boat in every respect. Then in her 'Gull Spirit' guise, she seemed to stand out from the other dinghies on display as the boat that seemed to fit my brief perfectly. I ordered one shortly after.

Gulls are available from the manufacturers in a specification that is more or less ready for cruising. They can be fitted with a furling jib, (furling but not reefing, as with a sail area of only 18 sq ft you either need the jib or you don't); a slab-reefing main that can be reefed in seconds and a watertight aft

locker that is big enough to store a small outboard if required. They also have the luxury of what we lovingly refer to as 'the parcel shelf', a large storage area under the foredeck. She can be rowed, motored or, when the current isn't too strong, paddled. I like to use a 'praddle' (see www.tridentuk.com/sailing/product-praddle-BBpraddle.html) as its design allows you to paddle with one hand and operate the tiller with the other. A small spinnaker of 60 sq ft is allowed in the class rules and although I've not seen this used to any great advantage when racing, it may be useful as a cruising chute.

The Gull behaves remarkably at sea. She is every bit the little sister of the Wayfarer and Wanderer dinghies. She has the same responsive but stable



The Gull 'Spirit'

feel of those boats. She is certainly livelier in heavy conditions as she is only 11ft 4ins LOA but you are probably doing something wrong if you manage to capsize her. I've sailed mine in a Force 8 and I never felt in any way that I shouldn't be doing so.

First designed in 1956 by Ian Proctor she was intended mainly as a training boat and was built, as most boats of that era were, from plywood, with the Mark II moulded from GRP about a decade later. The Mk III and IIIa were of slightly different construction: the boat lost its chines and turned into a round-bilged craft. This probably made it easier and cheaper to produce. Most Gulls until this point were fitted with



The Gull 'Spirit' on the Broads

a fore and aft mast step allowing the boat to be sailed as a Bermudan sloop (mast in rear position) or a una Bermudan (mast in forward step, discarding the jib).

From the early 1990s Anglo Marine began building what many consider to be the best Gulls. Their 'Gull Spirit' version is the boat favoured by Margaret Dye and is discussed in her book *Dinghy Cruising*. The current boat is the awfully named 'Gull Calypso' which differs only slightly from the Spirit and is still an excellent boat. Gull Spirits and Calypsos tend to be sought after on the secondhand market but mark IIIs are often found for a few hundred pounds and the wooden boats are often donated in a seaworthy condition free to good homes. I've managed to find homes for at least two such boats. One is now being restored and the other, *Kittiwake*, has already been turned into a stunningly restored boat by the new owner for only a few hundred pounds.

One of the things I especially like about the Gull is its ability to be sailed to windward without its foresail. When the wind pipes up the first thing to do is furl the jib. This can be done in a split second to reduce sail area and power, thus instantly reducing the likelihood of a knock-down. I tried this with my Heron dinghy once and it didn't sail to windward nearly as well. If you should happen to capsize the Gull you will see that she has a tendency to invert quickly. Many of the boats came with a pocket in the top of the mainsail where one may fit a floatation device to prevent this from occurring. The big orange thing that came with Anglo Marine boats is, in my humble opinion, excessive and probably ruins the shape of the sail in the top 2ft.

I have found that a small and discreet piece of waterproof foam about 1in thick is more than adequate to prevent inversion. (Please don't slap me with a lawsuit if your Gull inverts with this. It is just what I have found to work for me.)

A helpful tip: if you have an old discarded buoyancy aid, cut it open and remove the foam from the back piece. This will give about 30N of buoyancy which works perfectly and fits nicely into the pocket. I once capsized *Aurora* on Windermere when my mainsheet jammed in strong winds. The sail was reefed and the position of the float therefore, was much further down the mast reducing the leverage effect significantly. But still the boat did not turn turtle.

Righting the Gull is simple, assuming the mast is not stuck in the mud at the bottom of a lake, but again, this won't happen if buoyancy is used. Some people do find it hard to climb back inside the boat but a simple strop attached inboard normally solves this. I have never had a problem getting back on board.

Rowing the Gull is possible but not ideal. With a 5ft beam she is a wide boat with a shallow hull, but I once rowed her home from Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, to Lepe where the wind filled in to take me



The clean interior

back to Bucklers Hard and I rather enjoyed the experience. I use a pair of wooden 6ft 6ins oars (probably not the ideal size) that are joined midway allowing them to be split in two and stored under the foredeck where they are secured with a bungee. The boat was supplied with 6ft 6ins one-piece oars that simply did not fit inside! I've never used an outboard with the Gull as I hate the thought of carrying something so heavy and bulky on a small boat that I'm unlikely to use often enough. All Anglo Marine boats however, came with an outboard bracket fitted as standard and the locker was specifically designed to accommodate a Suzuki 2hp 2-stroke engine.

I've not yet slept aboard her but I know those who have and it is quite possible. If people have managed to camp on a 10ft 10ins Mirror dinghy then an 11ft 6ins Gull can only be a step in the right direction. I believe Margaret Dye gives tips on how to do this in her book.

So there you have it. The Gull is an instant cruising boat, simple to rig, launch and sail by oneself or with a crew and it is capable of sailing in stronger conditions than its dimensions would suggest. My boat came ready to cruise with furling jib and reefing mainsail, rowlocks and oars. When I set out to sea I simply stick my anchor in the boat and all the other necessary kit is either ready at hand or stored safely in the watertight aft locker. I have an excellent West Mersea 10ins-wheeled combi trailer that was supplied with the boat and this has done thousands of miles, towing the boat to the Norfolk Broads, the Lake District, the South Coast and many other places. Fully laden with cruising gear she is light enough to be pulled back up most launch ramps with ease.

(Below) Gull Mk I, Gull 'Spirit' & Gull Mk III



I remember the moment that sailing the Gull and dinghy sailing in general seemed to make perfect sense. After a year of owning a 21ft cruiser and enduring mooring fees and all the other costs involved in such an enterprise, I decided to celebrate the return to dinghy sailing with a fortnight's holiday in the Lake District. On a breezy day I was beating towards my favourite picnic spot on Ullswater. Hiking out hard, I felt snug in my drysuit as the rain started to fall and the small steep Lakeland waves made the boat skip along to windward. From my position perched on the port gunnel I could scan the boat's trim with one quick glance from bow to stern. Looking down under the foredeck I could see my sandwiches and a flask of hot coffee waiting for me as a small reward for a safely-made passage. Although I've had quite a collection of other boats. The Gull has always and will always be the only 'perfect' boat for me. CA



Restored Mk I

Gull Dinghy Specifications:

LOA 3.35m (11ft 4ins)

Beam 1.44m (4ft 9ins)

Draft 0.91m (3ft) (with centreboard down)

Hull weight 88kg (190lb)

Mainsail area 5.12 sq m (55.1 sq ft)

Jib 1.67 sq m (18.0 sq ft)

Spinnaker 5.57 sq m (60 sq ft)

PY 1361

For more information on the Gull you may contact me by email: chrisabela@hotmail.co.uk

For Gull information online visit the Gull blog – www.gulldinghysailing.blogspot.co.uk