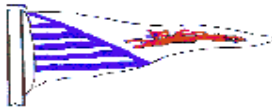


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JUNE 2002

Hi Fellow Bobcat and Catalac people, it doesn't seem possible that we are nearly half way through the year already as I sit down to write this front page. Although I am having to write it in advance of our trip into the French Canal System, or Peter will be shouting at me for the front page. I haven't got the laptop and mobile phone talking to one another at the moment, but I am fairly confident that I will have some thing to take with me. It is surprising how many of you now receive this newsletter by E'mail, I suppose it is something that our children are growing up with and except it as a way of life. I know one or two of you still have a problem downloading or printing off the newsletter but we are doing our best to sort out all the problems that arise and hopefully these are not to many now. I am well under way in producing a yearly events diary for UK south coast sailors but with my present activities it looks as though it won't come into operation until next year, but one way or another we have a few idea's that we hope will bring a few of you together for a drink and a chat or some thing similar. For those of you who might be thinking about going into the French Canal System, you need to obtain an

ICC, (International Certificate of Competence)

and the Cevni endorsment, any one wishing further information I can be contacted by e'mail or through our secretary P.G.

Ann is busy trying out baking bread and cakes on the boat and the smell is absolutely scrumptious, I can't wait to try them out. May's weather has been rather wet and windy but hopefully it might be like the saying goes, in like a lion and out like a lamb! Don't forget to keep a good log of your events this year, so you can let us know all about it. Good Sailing.

Bob Freeman President .

STRAYCAT (Bob 8.64) ONE DAY AT A TIME

By Ray Astle

The name STRAYCAT is quite apt I found her abandoned on a beach with children jumping and playing on her. She had lain there for quite some time and was in dire need of love and affection so after many hours of hard work she will be our roaming home. I have always been a roamer but marriage raising a family, earning a living etc. narrowed my horizons until retirement was approaching then wanderlust returned and plans began to be dreamed. The reality has to be tempered by age.

Hence the title. It is easier to sail a long way "port hopping", especially if time is not a problem.

Advantages of short legs are that you visit many more interesting places and meet more people. You don't arrive clapped out, as you may do after 30-50 hours at sea. Weather forecasting is more reliable. The tide can often be used for most of the trip. The mooring practice is better than R.Y.A. Competent Crew Course, But more important if trouble does occur you are probably fresh enough to deal with it. This may not be so after a long stint in adverse seas and weather.

Disadvantages more harbour dues (but the grapevine on passage will advise about cheap or free mooring places) Strong arms from all the mooring & anchoring.

The Passage plan.. South from Pwellheli through St. Georges channel. East up the Bristol channel until it can be crossed in one day. Round Lands End and a similar approach to the English channel. Enter French river/canal system. Minimum width of locks 5 m. (Straycat beam 4.3m) *E.T.A. Mediterranean coast of France- this year or next.* More detailed plan would be required for R.Y.A.Coastal Skipper Qualification. We did of course do our tidal sums en route. Before leaving bought Derrick Bowskills "Channel to the Mediterranean Sea" plus general chart of the French waterways (Imray).

Thursday 20th. June. Left Pwellheli at 13.30 in flat calm that became a fair wind to Abergstwyth.(a good first day that was to set the pattern for the next four days) Fishguard, Ramsey Sound, Solva, Jack Sound, then up Milford Haven for 2 nights a Neyland. It cant last and true enough here we met our first "Prophet of Doom" re. River Seine to Paris & canal system in general.

This is worth mentioning because Bowskill & "Navicarte" stress the potential difficulties.

They had been the subject of discussion for several weeks – *almost a mutiny!*

We moved to Dale for the night so we could make a dawn start across the Channel to Padstow. This was our longest passage, with several miles of tidal set E & W Lundy Isle was a reassuring sight in the middle of the passage, reducing time out of sight of land. We had 13 hrs. good sailing with dolphins for company into the Camel estuary where we waited overnight to lock into Padstow inner harbour in daylight.

Padstow is a delightful place, we planned to stay 4-5 days. Here we met John and his dog on "Sheldee" an old steel boat about 28' long. John was sailing round Britain on very little money. We also met a fleet from Swansea Y.C. on a cruise to the Scilly Isles. The wind was SW to W f 5 so we enjoyed a very social 9 days in the sheltered and sunny harbour with local bands and choirs performing 3 to 4 times a week. S.Y.C. arranged a cycle ride to Bodmin and the moor.

5 July. With good forecast all the yachts heading W or S departed as soon as tide permitted almost emptying the harbour within an hour. We joined some of the others and stopped in St Ives for the night before setting off past Long Ship Light round the corner into Mousehole. A very nice little drying harbour.

Round the Lizard was a bit bumpy I think I found the wrong way round the overfalls we carried on past the Manacles and anchored in Helford River, (D. Demauria Frenchmans Creek) We then traveled the 5 miles to finishing in front of R.C.Y.C. Falmouth for 2 days accompanied by "Sheldee".

The run to Poole stopping at Newton Ferrers, Brixham, Lyme Regis & Weymouth was smooth.

We picked up fuel at the floating jetty in Poole Harbour & rafted up on Town Quay it was 13.00 Saturday 13 July. We stayed for a few days entertaining friends, visiting relatives, shopping for extra fenders, long lock warps and "Navicarte La Seine Aval".

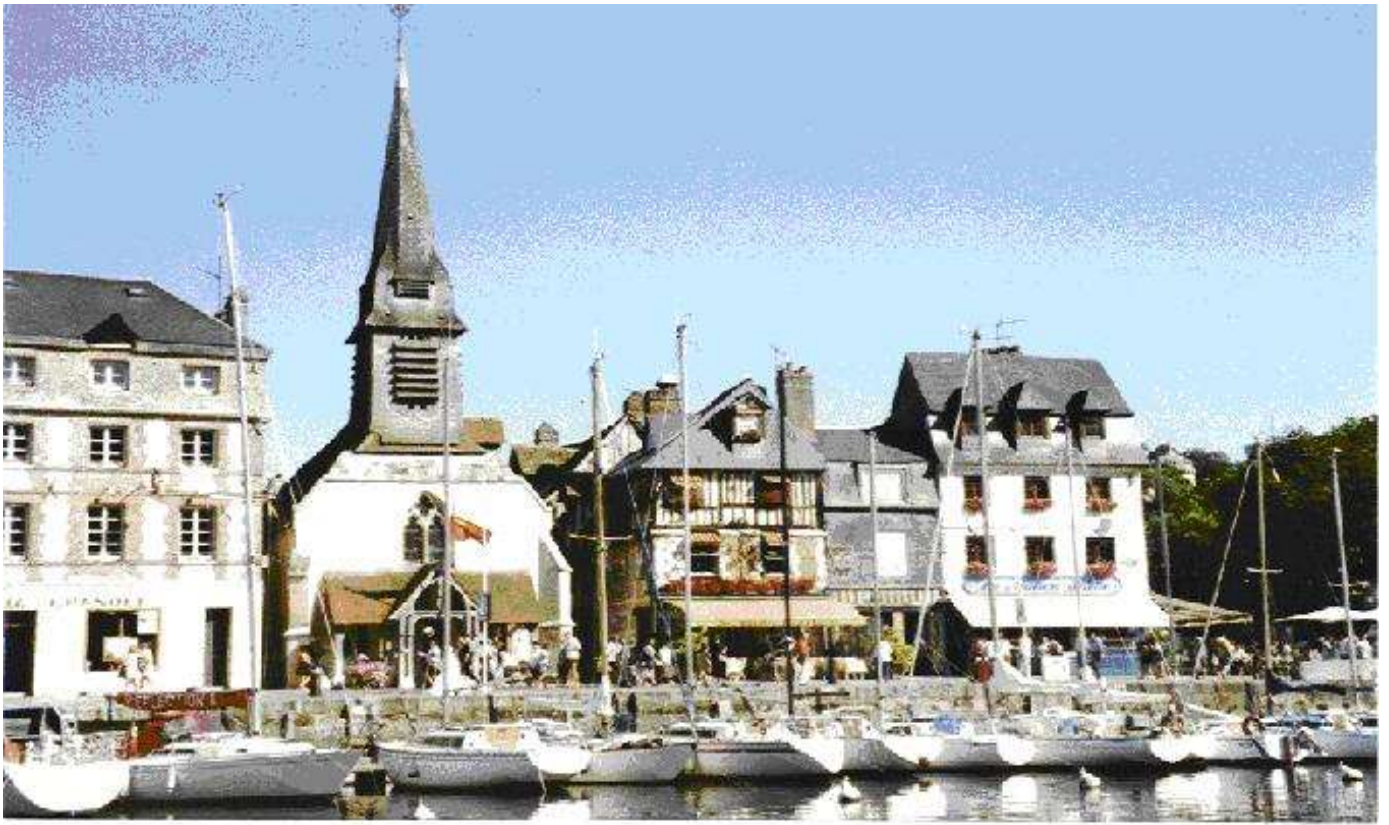
This bought the mutiny to a conclusion when my cousin a YM. Instructor, Pointed out "you've done Ramsey and jack Sounds, The Bristol Channel Lands End- the River Seine should be a piece ok cake.

19 July .Early start for the 12 hour passage to Cherbourg. Stayed on the waiting pontoon then on to St Vaast, Ouistreham and Honfleur, on the west side of the Seine estuary. Incidentally at all the these places we stayed and went ashore for at least one evening.

25 July

.Entered Honfleur by a new and very easy lock through the lift bridge into "Vieux Bassin" situated in the centre of this beautiful old town.

Rafted up against some very expensive boats in a very small space.



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Honfleur. *Who wrote the BOOK?* After this friendly visit by the police we returned 5kn. Through the industrial area to “Darse des Docks” to have the mast lowered on Monday. The job was done easily with the aid of a vintage crane, rusty pontoon and Jean and I as labourers. Mast trestles were constructed from one used many times before and scraps found lying about the dock.

In Darse we met Joel and Annick on a catamaran Jeannolick, having the mast lowered. We were invited to travel in company with them and followed them into Halte Plaisance de Rouen.

Dues duly paid to V.N.E. for our licence to travel the inland waterways. You pay for the days when the boat moves, i.e. a 30 day ticket covers the distance to the Med. Being in France we signed our own sailing days!

A coffee on Jeannolick and a walk round Rouen, we arranged to leave with the tide it changed very precisely from 2kn ebb to 2kn flow within 5 minutes. We were Joined by Skitawick an old circa 1938 motor cruiser crewed by two couples from Hampshire. The run into the Amfreville Ecluse lock was easy but there was nobody to take our lines. Joel was half way up the ladder when we realized one of us would have to take our lines hook them over the bollards and return to the boat as we were lifted to river level. Ships papers were examined by a very laid –back inspector at the top of a very high tower. On leaving the lock we find a well wooded and peaceful R.Seine & proceeded up to Le Mesnil Poses and stayed 99km to Paris.

Our convoy progressed steadily stopping each day after 2 or 3 locks, to enjoy any village we were near. To Vernon when Joel and Annick left us their holiday over. They have been good company and a big help we will miss them. Two more stops to Paris Merlon and Chaton scenery still wooded and gardens running down to the river.



Straycat & Skitawick rafted at Mevlon

I cant think where this is!!!

August 4th. Straycat and Skitwick sail into Paris, past the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame and under all the bridges into the Canal St. Martin where we lock into a marina just 10 min walk from Notre Dame, close to a metro station and Place de la Bastille, in a garden with all the usual facilities.

We stayed four nights , shopping, sight seeing, chatting and researching the route ahead, Made a sun shade , drank coffee, wine, and pastiche then arranged to met our son Chris and his wife Elin for a week.

Left Paris using the Navicarte La Seine Amont and made our way around the forest of Fontainebleau to St Mammes. By now the locks were a simple routine large peniches were infrequent. Sent a fax to Cris. showing our location and awaited their arrival on 15th. August we said goodbye to Skitawick on the 14th.

We left the Seine for the river Yonne. had the engine serviced by Evans marine in Sens. The l'Yonne has six unique locks with sloping sides. Had our only near miss with a Peniche in one of them.



The water is cleaner, there are more herons we indulged ourselves with lunchtime swims and life is very pleasant on the Yonne, with a larger crew. 18th. August we left the Yonne and entered the canal Bourgogne at Migeunes, where we stayed the night.

The Bourgogne is a true canal with more locks and more open scenery, Hotel boats and hire boats are the main traffic. The waterway is narrower, shallower and the banks are broken in many places.

Care had to be taken when in the range of hotel boats.

Cris and Elin left us at Tonnerre where it rained- a tropical type storm for an hour. This is our tenth week away from home and life is very pleasant. Locks are often in chains with long stretches between each chain. Our longest day with two chains totaling 32 locks, this is a far cry from the Seine when 3 was considered a good day.

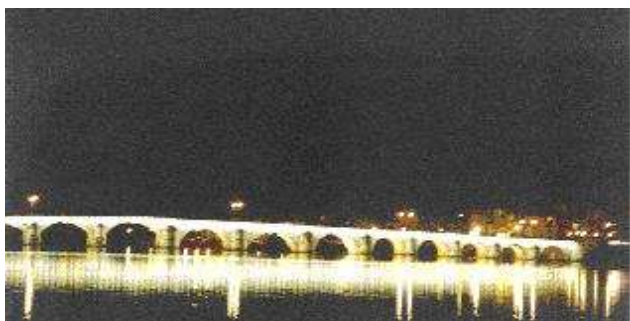
August 28th. This is our last uphill day 14 locks in the rain to Pouilly en Auxois at 1230 ft above sea level. Stayed the night at Pouilly ready to go down hill no worries except perhaps the 3.3km tunnel, 5 mtrs wide and no tow path. Made arrangements with la Capitane to enter the tunnel at 14.40. After safety equipment check of side lights, headlamp, la handheld torch, life jackets, even the bucket was checked and approved before we were allowed to continue!!!



The trip through the tunnel at low speed was simple but concentration cannot be relaxed. Jean took some flash photos before coming out into the large wooded basin. The next run down to Plombieres near Dijon was easy and warm. We met Efemel again and went aboard a peniche that is being converted into a floating hostel by a bearded Canadian from Vancouver. We drank the local drink Kir (white wine & crème de cassis).. Todd off Efemel had been onboard this boat 12 years ago.

Jean and I went into Dijon by bus but could not find a way of paying for the fare. Later Todd and Elsie explained the ticket system over tea and biscuits on Straycat.

September 4th. Leave Plombieres heading for St. Jean de Losne and the H2o marina at the end of the canals. Two days later we enter the river Saone with the Saone Navicarte by our side and useful advice from a Belgian couple. Sailing down the Saone with glimpses of the Alps the weather felt cooler our ports of call were Seurre, Chalon and Macon.



With only six very big automatic locks to Lyon we traveled quickly aided by current and Mistral wind on our backs. Stayed at Trevoux then straight through Lyon into the mighty Rhone with Locks to match. At Tournon we were chased off our mooring before breakfast by a Rhone waterbus at least 150ft long!!! We all like early starts!!



Passing Epervier, near Valence locked in to the marine liked it so decided to stop for the night. The following afternoon we enquired about wintering in the closed compound the price fair we decide to leave the boat. It is just 210km to the med a weeks run. September 18th. Straycat was lifted out closed and sheeted over by the 22nd. When we caught the Euroline coach to London, National Express to Bangor, where David had left our car.

Home in 27 hours our only overnight passage.

Total Straycat distance 1320nm and 232 Locks.
Continued next month.

>>>>>>>>>> OWNERS MODIFICATION'S <<<<<<<<<<<<

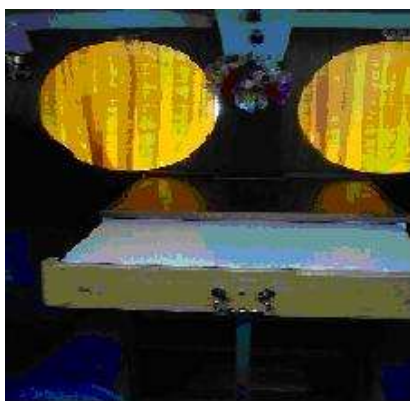
Bob's Table Mod.

A modification I have recently carried out to our 8m catalac "*Think Again*" was to change the table arrangement in the main cabin

It has always been a problem having a table in between the seats / bunks and having to move it around and find some where to put it out of the way. Over the years we have tried various idea's, cutting up tables, fixing folding legs etc, but now we have probably got the best option which is an idea taken from Alan and Shirley on "*Duplicat*". It is a roll away table designed for kitchen units, its top size is approximately 600mm wide by 500mm deep and they come in two pull out lengths 0.8m or 1.2m approx. it then needs to be housed or fitted to a base unit with facia and trim made to suit, the smaller unit comes with one leg and the longer one with 2 legs, although we purchased the longer one we only fitted it with one central leg, which seems quite strong enough to support it when in the fully extended mode.



useful storage in drawes



half extended



fully extended

MODS DONE ON AKU AKU



AKU-AKU moved away from the berth at Dell Quay where she had lain for so long.

Within seconds we had collected a rope around the screw and progress was arrested with some ignorminity. However the drive leg was easily raised and the offending line cut clear with the serrated edge of my multitool. These things really are a boon, particularly when working aloft. This proved the convenience of the lifting Sillette leg and I remembered only too well donning diving gear to clear the prop for another vessel which had suffered a similar fate only a few weeks earlier. Out in deeper water we borrowed a buoy, and sorted things until Aku Aku was more shipshape. Setting off down the channel we were immediately called upon to

negotiate the local dinghy race. Clearing this without incident served to test our manoeuvring capabilities. I was more than pleased.

Why is it we always doubt our own ideas?

We motored on down the weed encluttered water till the overheat warning squawk screamed at us. A quick inspection of the inlet water strainer showed it to be full of greenery. Because of its inboard location it was quickly and easily cleared. After restarting, the temperature gauge fell to its normal reading so we continued towards the anchorage.

We began to learn the value of our forward viewing Echo Pilot. It has subsequently proved to be an enormous asset, enabling the exploration of creeks and estuaries where one would normally only venture in a dinghy.

This is just one of the many advantages of catamarans as compared with the keel boats I had owned in the past. We still use the good old lead line to check bottom contour and type of ground. This way we normally dry out level and therefore comfortable. A clothes peg on the lanyard makes a good adjustable sounding marker incidentally. We also find the inboard raw water strainer to be very convenient, there is so much weed about these days that easy access to the strainer seems to have become a priority.

On reaching the anchorage we found it crowded to capacity so we sneaked off into the shallows away from the crowds. We set our anchor, motoring it in to be sure and settled down to a bit of peace and quiet. Inevitably, a large highly polished plastic stink boat arrived and steamed about looking for a vacant spot. The skipper evidently concluded that there was plenty of water where we were and parked the plastic monster a little downstream of us. Oh well we thought, he will learn. The sound of music rent the air! The tide ebbed unrelentingly, the way it does, and soon there came the sound of diesels starting and a rattling anchor chain. Thankfully the monster departed breathing foul black smoke and noise, but leaving us in peace once again. We actually took a welcome rest from our labours that weekend, returning to our Dell Quay berth with ease, running before the wind with only the genoa set. I was agreeably surprised at the speed achieved though we were on a flood tide. We were obliged to start the donkey once we encountered the usual dinghy race. Dodging them, (giving way?) can at times be both interesting and exciting, as I am sure you all know!

In refitting AKU-AKU. to be our home afloat we have introduced a number of modifications.

I shall try to explain them as this saga progresses in the hope that some of the ideas may be of interest. High on our list of important requirements was a means of keeping properly and thoroughly clean. We were quickly disenchanted with the shortcomings and heavy water consumption of a conventional shower system. Facilities ashore are in our experience often both inadequate and expensive, not to mention jolly fine Verruca breeding grounds. Cruising on a limited income demands economies, one of which is a reluctance to go alongside to be at the mercy of the outstretched authoritarian grasping hand.

Our vessel is therefore geared to be as independent of shoreside facilities as possible. Gradually we evolved the arrangement shown in the diagram. It very simply recirculates a relatively small amount of water contained in a sump set into and below the shower tray. The unit is in fact an adapted automatic shower drain pump unit. In our case the shower is in the heads, which benefits from an outlet port coupled to the warm air forced draught heater. Some may view a wet locker as more appropriate place for a shower facility. So aboard AKU-AKU, the drill for taking a shower is something like this:-

In winter first open the heater outlet and warm up shower/heads compartment. Ensure cleanliness of shower tray and sump. Fill with hot water and perhaps a little of your favourite bubble bath additive. For filling, ours can be connected to the hot/cold water system. Alternatively use water from the kettle, instant gas heater or black bag left out in the sun if there should be sufficient. Switch on the circulating pump, discard the first gush of water since it may have been static in the feed pipe and shower rose for some time. Test water temperature and adjust if necessary. Step under and enjoy your shower. *Consider sharing it with a friend!* It will gradually cool off in use but a little extra hot may be added from time to time to maintain the temperature. You may use the shower continuously until you feel the need to rinse off, at which point the water is discarded down either sink or loo by pointing the shower head that way. Replenish with fresh water and rinse off you may off course repeat the cycle if you wish. When finished pull the drain plug and switch on the bilge pump. Clean out the sump, filter and shower rose ready for the next time.

The system is effective, invigorating and economical on water. I do not claim credit for the idea as it may be found detailed in the "Marine Electronics Bible" by John C. Payne. I merely write from first hand experience.

I will detail how we made our main double berth very comfortable indeed without sacrificing foot room! As I have become a little older I am now much less tolerant of lack of good quality sleep. Very high on our list of priorities was as comfortable a berth as possible.

AKU-AKUs original main mattress was still in remarkably good condition.

We wanted to increase its thickness to improve comfort but realised that this would tend to reduce footroom in the trotter box. Something we had noticed seemed better in the 9 than the 8mtr boats. I have big feet, and lack of footroom would undoubtedly cause sleep sapping discomfort and was therefore to be avoided. I also find that I cannot sleep properly head down and feet up, hence our ongoing use of the lead line when drying out overnight. We tried all sorts of ideas including an inflatable mattress under the original. Our berth is standard double size so we contemplated a conventional domestic mattress but reasoned that its springs probably would not last long in a salt atmosphere. It would also undoubtedly reduce footroom and why dispose of the original when it was in such good condition? Eventually I had an idea which has subsequently proved a winner as far as we are concerned. We purchased a suitable density block of fire retardent foam measuring 4 ft x 6ft x 6ins. We had it cut into two wedge shaped pieces. One half 5ins. tapering down to 3ins. the remainder was therefore 3ins. tapering down to 1 ins. By butt joining the two 3inch faces back to back a block measuring 4ft wide 6ft long x 5ins thick one end and inch at the other was created. This was placed under the original mattress thick end at the head, thin end under feet. The result, absolute bliss! Probably the most comfortable berth I have ever slept on. It also cost half of what a full size replacement would have been.

We had come across others who had discarded their original foam in favour of a replacement only to hear them complaining a few months later because the new stuff had not lasted long. Under the mattresses is a layer of loft type insulative foam which further reduces the effects of cold air passing under our bridge deck.

We have both suffered our share of back problems over the years. The comfort of the berth combined with our change of lifestyle seems to have dramatically reduced such problems and aches and pains in general!

Back at Dell Quay we worked away at the perpetual list. Soon we decided to go off on more trials. Aku- Aku had earlier belonged to Jim Andrews who wrote Catamarans for Cruising. We were anxious to find out if his enthusiasm was well founded. Even now we sometimes find we are asked if our boat is THE Aku-Aku? As always when clearing Chichester Bar we found the wind to be on the nose, or noses in our case but the tide was favourable and we made credible headway in a westerly direction beating into wind as always. It took some time to learn to put her about, and I found balancing the sails to achieve a decent track somewhat more tricky than I was accustomed to.

The Rotostay furling played up and I was obliged to treat the genoa as if it were hanked on, hauling it down into a sail bag instead of rolling it up away on its foil. I had fitted a new internal luff wire at the same time as renewing the standing rigging but I chose not to bother changing the plastic ball race in the "cotton reel" for the stainless steel update. Now I was paying the price of false economy. I knew I would be in for at least one trip up the stick to rectify that one.

We continued into ever increasing wind and noted gusts of 7-8. Aku -Aku did not seem much bothered by it but she did heel a trifle from time to time. We sailed down the main channel between the Forts, the GPS registering speeds across the ground which I had previously only experienced on an old Fiver Tri which I brought back from Brightlingsea.

Cowes loomed up in what seemed like very little time. We downed the sails and motored in. Nothing dramatic ever changes here, prominent corporate names come and go it seems but not much else.

The local Pirates are as active as ever with dory, out stretched hand and ticket punch!

On an earlier visit we were had been accosted at the Folly Inn with a demand for the princely sum £6, for what would have been a visit of an hour at most.

Our crime was that of going alongside the pontoon at 2200hrs with the idea of imbibing some refreshment. We declined the offer at the time and went on to an anchorage beyond the moorings.

Again we put down our hook, put up the anchor light, struck the Ensign and settled down for a quiet evening reflecting on Aku – Aku's characteristics. Night fell, the flood tide settled into slack, peace, yet we could hear the sound of a small boat approaching. There came a knock on the hull. I switched on the deck light and shot thought the door expecting a discussion. There was none I was merely asked to move a little closer in towards the bank as the 'Gravel Boat' was on her way up the channel. On the slack we had drifted towards the main channel and I was glad of the advice. We weighed and did as advised none too soon as we were soon aware of the vessel in question making rapid progress towards her berth up river.

Now at last all was quiet. We slept that sound sleep that only tired mariners know!

To be continued.

**We are not responsible for any loss or damage caused by any alterations or modifications from your boats original design .
All mods that appear in this news letter are done by owners who may or may not be qualified marine engineers.**