

April Blog

April sees the first of our new onshore training courses being delivered by Dave Bointon a Two day course on **Essential Navigation** we all think it will never happen to us but I hope the day never comes that the sea mist/fog comes down when you are just round the Newport side of Cermaes Head, could you navigate a course back to the club house. I think I would struggle.

Do you keep routes on your GPS allowing you to follow a safe route back. Being safe is one of my main priorities and people may think I am a chicken when I decide I don't feel safe on the water and turn for home. Personally I don't care what blag people offer me for turning back and nor should you be bullied into going somewhere you think is above your pay scale when at sea. In recent weeks I have cancelled more courses on the water because of high winds and the sea state. Maybe I am too cautious but better safe than sorry. The sea is not very forgiving.

Consider doing a course with Dave it could improve your knowledge and allow you to have more fun on the water.

Weather

In the UK, the Shipping Forecast is currently provided by the UK Met Office and is regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on behalf of the British Maritime & Coastguard Agency.

It is broadcast at 0048 hrs on FM and LW (including reports from coastal stations, inshore waters forecast and brief UK weather outlook). The forecast is broadcast also at 0520hrs (FM & LW), 1201 hrs (normally LW only) and at 1754hrs (LW on weekdays and FM and LW at weekends).

The broadcast format is limited to 370 words and has a very strict format. This is so as to simplify and standardise the delivery of what is a lot of detailed information. The format is as follows.

- Time and Date of the active forecast being read.
- List Gale Warnings current around the British Isles
- General Synopsis
- Area Forecasts
- Inshore Waters Forecast

The sea areas around the British Isles and the Western Coast of Spain, Portugal and Ireland are included in the forecast. This has relevance as in the UK most prevailing weather systems arrive having passed through the North Atlantic.

Making sense of the Information

The time the forecast was issued is critical as all other times and estimates relate to it. The time of the forecast may be different to the time of the broadcast. Listen!

Listening to what is happening in your local area is likely to give you a good idea of what to expect tomorrow around the area, dependent on the track of the low and high pressure systems and their speed. So, listening to the synopsis and the surrounding areas will give you a good idea of what's to come.

Make notes as you go. Ideally you will use an easily identifiable shorthand that all can read but if you have your own make sure you 'translate' the relevant information and log it for their information.

A typical forecast for several sea areas might be.

"Humber, Thames. Southeast veering southwest 4 or 5, occasionally 6 later. Thundery showers. Moderate or good, occasionally poor."

What this is telling us is that the sea areas Humber and Thames (basically a large part of the western North Sea from Hull to the Dover Straits) is forecast to experience a SW wind direction blowing Force 4 or 5, sometimes F6 later. 'Later' is specifically at time over 12 hours from the time the forecast was ISSUED.

Force 4 or 5 might seem to be of little worry, even to most yachtsmen, especially if they are heading North up the West coast of the UK in the lee of the mainland on a broad reach. In fact, if you keep listening, the Inshore Waters Forecast for your area might well reflect that rationale and wind strengths and sea state might be significantly less as a result.

However, the fact that a F6 is forecast later should make you think about your plan, especially with thundery showers and occasionally poor visibility forecast. I was always told sailors avoid going out in Thunderstorms due to the mast on the boat and we used to cancel dinghy sailing if Thunder and lightening were forecast.

A Beaufort Wind Strength Force 4 is an average of about 15 knots. That is pleasant sailing for most. Even a Force 5 is usually nothing to worry about. Using a quick ready-reckoner, we can soon work out that a F5 is likely to deliver about 20 knots (The Force - in this case 5 - minus 1 = 4 x 5 = 20kts). This works well as a mean wind strength conversion from the Beaufort Scale to knots.

A Force 6, coupled with veering winds (moving clockwise), which are likely to put the wind on the beam or forward of the beam when sailing, potentially increasing the sea state (especially if blowing down the coast against a flooding tide) is a different animal altogether. And the visibility is dropping too. Thundery showers, poor visibility, wind veering and increasing. Sounds like a front could be blowing through to me. Let's keep an eye on the barometer and consider a change of course. What was our nearest port of refuge in our passage plan? How about we set a course for that sheltered port and enjoy some pub grub tonight?

I am not a sailor and I question how good/bad I am at handling a Rib every time I go out. but nicked a lot of this from a friend's blog.

There is so much information on weather but a few terms you might hear are.

VISIBILITY

Good = >5 n miles

Moderate = 2 - 5 n miles

Poor = 1,000 metres - 2 n miles

Very Poor = Less than 1,000 metres

TIMING

Imminent = Within 6 hours of issue

Soon = 6 - 12 hours of issue

Later = >12 hours from issue

A few terms used in forecasts.

Gale Warning -Average wind is expected to be force 8 or more.

Strong wind -Average wind expected to be force 6 to 7.

Imminent, - within 6 hours of the time of issue.

Soon, - within 6 to 12 hours of time of issue.

Later, - More than 12 hours from time of issue

Visibility - Good greater than 5 miles, moderate between 2-5 miles poor 1000m to 2 miles. Fog less than 1000 metres

Fair No significant precipitation

Wind

Veering = Wind direction moving clockwise

Backing = Wind direction moving anti clockwise

Beaufort scale

Force 1-3 (1-10 knots)

Occasional wave crests wave height 0-.09m

Force 3-5 (7-21 knots)

Boisterous seas at the top of the force range when sheltered waters should be found.

Wave height 0.9 -2.5m.

Force 6 and above (21 knots and above)

Large waves, white foam crests Glad to see port.

Wave height -F5 2.5 metres force 6 up to 4 metres and F7 up to 7.5 metres.

As we get closer to having fun on the water it is in my view advisable to get a good weather forecast, My blogs are only my opinions and you have to decide on your own course of action

Stay safe and have fun.