

# 'We were up the creek without an anchor'

Anchored on a falling tide, at night, and faced with grounding, Kitiara Pascoe finds her CQR irretrievably fouled



PHOTO: JIM PASCOE

Kit and Alex beam with pride on the bow of their first boat, the Nicholson 32 Berwick Maid

I am drifting off to sleep aboard our Nicholson 32, *Berwick Maid*, at about 2200 while my partner Alex fuffs around nautically with something, somewhere. We spent two nights anchored in Sark but the swell picked up and we fled to a tiny, sheltered Guernsey bay. We're the only boat here and there's no moon. Mercifully it's flat calm.

As I try not to think about having to get up at 0400 for a return Channel crossing to Portsmouth, a hand taps my ankle. 'I'm just going to drop back on the anchor a bit, we're shallower than I thought and the tide has another metre to drop.'

'How shallow?' I ask, cosy in bed. '0.5m beneath the keel.'

Huh.

He says he can do it alone but five minutes later, after the engine revving and some serious banging of chain on the bow above my head, he calls for my help. Not knowing how urgent this is, I hop out of bed and put on some clothes.

As I join him on the bow, he's pointing a torch into the water. The anchor is somehow stuck on the flat, sandy seabed.

*'As I join him on the bow, Alex is pointing a torch into the water'*

The tides work fast around here and we don't have long until we're aground. We're so shallow that we can easily see the anchor in the clear water, but what it's stuck on is not so clear.

There's only one solution. Swimming. Alex gets on his wetsuit impressively quickly and gets into the 12°C water. Obviously I could have gone in instead, but treating me for the resulting hypothermia would take time we really don't have. It doesn't take long to discover that our CQR is stuck in an ancient-looking iron loop poking out of the seabed. In a beautifully sandy bottom, what are the chances of getting caught on this? It won't budge and we can't move ahead to get it out the way it went in because we'd run aground.

We try looping a rope through the top of the anchor and reversing, engine going

hard astern. The rope snaps. Out of both time and tide, we tie a fender onto the end of the anchor chain and let it run free, retreating to deeper water. We are now anchorless – totally, in fact, as we lost our kedge earlier the same day. No, I kid you not.

As the fender bobs about, marking our abandoned ground tackle, we pick up a private mooring buoy across the bay. Safe for now, we turn the engine off and think.

We decide to row out in our inflatable tender, unshackle the chain and pull the anchor out by hand underwater. As we row across, the pitch-black water lights up with glowing, green sparks of phosphorescence, and with no wind, there's no sound. I can't help but relish the peace and beauty as we get further from the boat, lit up in the distance by her deck light.

I don't know if Alex feels the same; he is after all, rowing in a freezing cold, soaking wetsuit. The rowing will warm him up

though. Maybe.

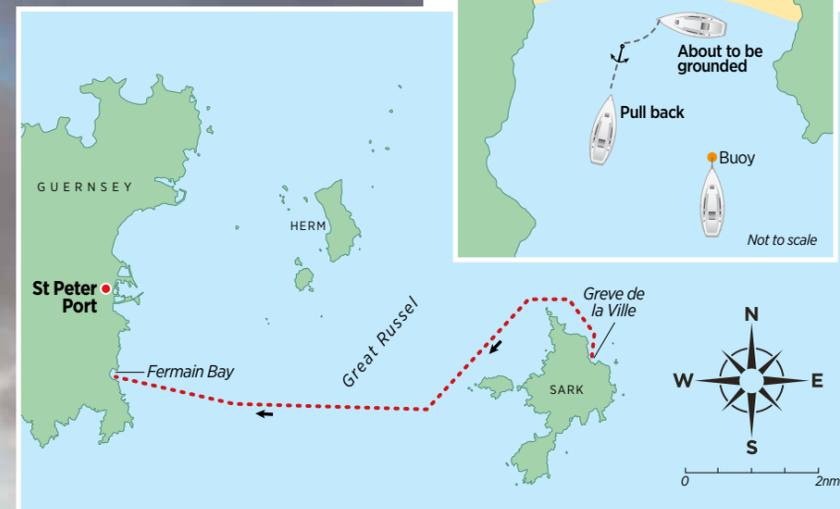
We anchor the dinghy by lifting some chain over it and I watch from above as he unshackles the anchor from the chain and tries to pull it through from the other side. He comes up for air but his kicking makes the sand bloom, clouding the water. I've drifted a bit in the dinghy and so has he, floating on the tide. Pointing the torch through the now murky water, 'Where's the anchor?' he calls.

He swims about trying to locate the shiny hook on the flat, sandy bottom. I pull up more chain from the floor in an effort to stop drifting but end up knocking the bung out of the dinghy. Air hisses out as the dinghy, 300 metres from the boat, begins to deflate. Seriously?

I scrabble about looking for the bung and try to jam it back into the valve. I avert a sinking and suddenly remember that because we reversed on the anchor initially, the chain must be in a straight line from where we dropped it, to really near the anchor. I call to the shivering diver to follow the line of the chain and within a few seconds he finds the anchor, far from where we thought it was.

He frees it and lays all 25kg of it in the tender. We then pull up the chain (40kg) and spread it out into the bottom of the dinghy, complete with its fender marker. We row back to the boat, still bobbing about happily on the mooring. Sometimes I wonder whether she's just plain bemused at our antics.

We transferred everything back on board and deflated the dinghy, not that it needed much help. By 0030 we were finally in bed. The alarm was set for 0400, in time to catch the strong flood tide up Alderney Race and out past Cap de la Hague to cross the Channel back to the UK. Though only briefly, I slept very, very well. ▲



LEFT: The sun sets over Berwick Maid's mooring in Newtown River, before crossing the Channel



Berwick Maid's CQR rests in its well before the incident that almost brought about its loss



PHOTOS: ALEX FRANCIS UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

## Kitiara Pascoe

Freelance copywriter Kit, 25, had only crossed the channel by ferry when her partner Alex Francis, 28, having sailed as crew previously, decided to buy a Nicholson 32 in 2013. After refitting *Berwick Maid* in Portsmouth Harbour they are sailing south this summer to warmer waters, using the 'learn-by-doing' school of education.

## Lessons learned

■ Always double-check the tidal height calculations, especially in places with large tidal ranges and fast streams like the Channel Islands.

■ If you leave anything temporarily on the seabed, mark it with something that floats. We put a fender on the end of our chain, but not on our anchor and very nearly lost it completely.

■ Cable-tie the anchor shackle pin, or seize it with string or wire. We forgot this on our kedge and lost it that morning – the pin must have worked its way loose.

■ Never assume the other crew has checked the depth properly – all it takes is one mistake or change of wind direction to create a bit of chaos. Both of you should be happy that you'll have enough water below to be comfortable at low tide.

■ Be prepared to get into the water. Without wetsuits on board we may not have been able to rescue our anchor, and without our powerful diving torch there's no way we could have found or freed it.