

## Sailing to the Eddystone Lighthouse in a Traditional Dinghy



### **Expedition Report**

The Eddystone Lighthouse is on the Eddystone Rocks 10 nautical miles S by W of Plymouth Breakwater.

#### **History of the Eddystone**

The first lighthouse on the Eddystone Rocks was an octagonal wooden structure built by Henry Winstanley in 1698. During construction, a French privateer took Winstanley prisoner, causing Louis XIV to order his release with the words "*France is at war with England, not with humanity*". Winstanley's tower lasted until the Great Storm of 1703 during which it was destroyed taking Winstanley with it, who was working on the structure.

Following the destruction of the first lighthouse Captain Lovett acquired the lease of the rock. By an Act of Parliament he was allowed to charge passing ships a toll of one penny per ton. A new lighthouse was built in 1709. This conical wooden structure around a core of brick proved more durable, surviving nearly fifty years.

The third lighthouse was designed by John Smeaton. It was modelled on the shape of an oak tree and built of granite blocks. Smeaton pioneered hydraulic lime, a concrete that will set under water, and secured the granite blocks using dovetail joints and marble dowels. The light was lit in 1759. The lighthouse was dismantled in the 1880s and rebuilt on Plymouth Hoe where it stands today. The stub of the tower remains beside the current lighthouse as the foundations proved too strong to be dismantled and were left where they stood.

The current, fourth lighthouse was lit in 1882. In 1982 it was the first Trinity House offshore lighthouse to be converted to an automated light. The tower has had a helipad built above the lantern in order to allow maintenance crews access.



### **Immersion Trials**

In order to be confident that we could right the dinghy in the event of an offshore capsizing we took the dinghy out for immersion trials. Poor conditions were chosen in February; the inshore waters forecast gave Force 6 to Gale 8 winds. In any event, conditions were such that it was too windy to row into the wind. Initially the dinghy was tied onto a mooring. This meant that her bows faced the wind and it was easy to right the dinghy. The mooring was let go and the boat quickly drifted to leeward. For a short period she was out of control. Under a triple reefed sail the boat was tacked towards the starting point before being capsized by gybing her. The hull lay beam onto the wind and it was more difficult to right the boat because when she began to right the sail pinned her back down. The sail was taken off in the water, the boat righted and bailed out. Then the sail was sent up, to tack back towards the starting point. With no intention of going on an expedition in such conditions the boat's righting capabilities were deemed a success.



### **Expedition Report**

From March 5<sup>th</sup> Sara and I were on standby. The weather window came sooner than expected with potentially good conditions for Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>.

At 0300 we jumped out of bed (a more honest description would include the words groaned and rolled). After a hearty breakfast I set off and collected the dinghy from the boat shed, arriving back at the house to collect Sara and set off for Plymouth at 0430.

By 0530 the dinghy was afloat on the Mountbatten slipway in the Cattewater. Epirb, GPS, VHF, compass and torch stored in one dry bag, hats and gloves in another and with enough stores on board to get us to America (which included boiled eggs, chocolate, bananas and avocados). It was dark and there was frost on the deck.



At 0545 we zipped ourselves into drysuits, checked the dinghy's buoyancy bags and pushed off into the ebb tide, giving local weather expert Chris Tibbs an early morning call as we sailed into Plymouth Sound. All looked favourable as a grey dawn light seeped onto the scene. We reported our intentions to Brixham Coastguard. Rowing and sailing towards the Western Entrance of the Breakwater we passed close by two frigates which looked suitably sinister in the half light. The plan was to work towards the West until on a transit between Rame Head and the Eddystone (a course of S by W) in order to minimise the trouble we might have if the SW wind came earlier than expected. As a luminous pink sunrise changed to deep orange a trawler was silhouetted in wonderful detail against the backdrop of Bolt Tail. The Eddystone looked like a bamboo pole and there was little wind. We did a lot of rowing.



By 1000 we were approaching the rocks with a gentle swell from SW. We made an anti-clockwise circumnavigation of the reef hoping to land on the NE side. However, due to the swell there was a rise and fall of up to 10', which made landing without destroying the dinghy unlikely. Fortunately there was a rock in the lee of the lighthouse, which itself had a leeward side. With careful rowing Sara was able to get nearby so that I could step out onto an underwater ledge and climb onto the rock. Sara rowed the dinghy back towards the lighthouse and I took some photos of her. We must get on fairly well as she returned to pick me up.

We sailed away on light SW breeze which soon faltered. I took to the oars and, with what I felt to be the more difficult part of the trip complete, felt quite chatty. There was some consternation from the lady at the helm who, enjoying the peaceful scene wondered why there was so much noise from the engine and suggested that perhaps a better installation would include sound proofing. Falling out in a dinghy, physically or socially is bad seamanship. Fortunately the SW wind came up and we had an exciting sail back to Plymouth, punctuated by a three course lunch

after which Sara fell asleep and awoke in time for a photograph in front of Smeaton's Eddystone Lighthouse on Plymouth Hoe.



This expedition was entirely self-funded in order to raise awareness and money for WaterAid, a charity which increases access to clean water in third world countries. For those wishing to donate please visit [www.justgiving.com/will-stirling](http://www.justgiving.com/will-stirling). We are very grateful to all those who have given so generously to WaterAid in support of this expedition.

Our thanks are due to Aquanauts, Brixham Coastguard, Chris Tibbs Weather, Claire James, John Gallagher, Steve Jackson and the Mount Batten Centre.



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