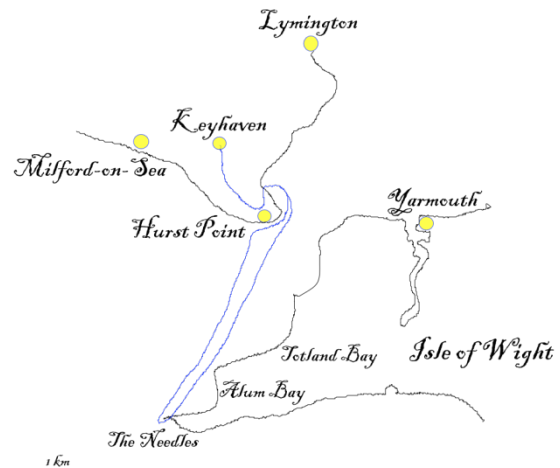


I've had my AdvancedFrame for nearly four years now, during which time I've traversed most of the coastline and navigated the rivers between Chichester and Lymington plus a few trips to the Lake District and Snowdonia. The kayak has performed superbly. I hadn't done any kayaking for about 10 years as I'd been without the storage space or the transport to take a rigid 'yak. Then I started researching inflatables and decided to give the AdvancedFrame a try; not least because it 'looked' like a proper kayak - and so it has proved to be. Very quickly it gave me the confidence to take on the waves of the Solent and, having used up all of the mainline coastline, there was only one way to go - across to the Isle of Wight.



The Solent, certainly the East side of it, is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. Having seen the size of some of the ships going by, I didn't fancy nipping in front of them or crossing their wake. However, on the West side there is the narrowest point with fewer big ships and the added bonus of The Needles - a trio of chalk stacks at the Western

corner of the Isle of Wight. However, as there is a significant narrowing of the channel here, there can be some scary tidal currents and timing is more important. So, I decided to set out from the hamlet of Keyhaven, near Lymington, cross the Solent and head down the coast of the Isle of Wight to the Needles, which I would go around and head back.



There's a handy pay-and-display car park next to the yachting club in Keyhaven and the yachting club are seemingly happy to let kayakers launch from their hard slipway. The slipway is useable for the full tidal range, which is good as I set off just before low tide. It's a bit of a zig-zag following the channel out from the marina to the Solent, but it doesn't take long to get to open water. There's an old fort at the end of the shingle spit that forms Hurst Point. But, I was in a hurry to get to The Needles so more on this later! Rounding Hurst Point puts you right into what seems to be the strongest current. There was a 15-25kn north-easterly wind blowing me in the right direction, but this was kicking up the waves to almost a metre - nothing I haven't dealt with in the AdvancedFrame elsewhere in the Solent.



So, with the wind and current behind me I set forth in a straight line to the Needles. I skimmed past the point between Totland and Alum Bays. This offered a bit of shelter from the wind and waves and provided a camera opportunity during a quick rest.



By this time it was low tide so there was no current. The waves around the Needles were still a bit rough but I made it through the widest gap and back around the lighthouse. Behind The Needles is the old test point for the Black Knight and Black Arrow rockets. I spent a moment imagining what a sight it must have been with white hot flames exploding down the hillside!

I wanted to get back to Hurst Point before the current grew strong, so I didn't hang about and headed straight back. However, as I approached the mainland the waves died down (not sure why, it was still windy and the current was picking up). But this did give me a chance to give Hurst Castle a good look from the outside. It was built for Henry 8<sup>th</sup> and re-fortified for the Napoleonic and World Wars. It's well worth a visit and does look quite intimidating when looking up from a small kayak.



From here it's just a matter of re-tracing the channel back through the marina and packing up.



The trip distance was about 17km and it has to be one of the best routes on the south coast. If you're not an experienced sea-kayaker, I'd recommend building up some experience of the Solent waves, tides and currents around Hayling Island and the Hamble before attempting the route – but this is no hardship as there's lots of good paddling to be done there.

Nathan

© Vortex 2013