

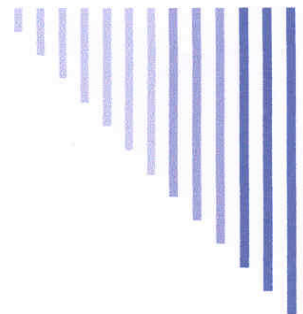
SCOUTS OFFSHORE

THE SCHEME HISTORY

BY KEN WRIGHT MBE



**ADVENTURES
OFFSHORE**



Chapter One – Sallie

The Scheme started in 1964 for Colchester Scouts as a result of cruises made across to the continent in a 27-foot whaler – when I was running the 12th Colchester Sea Scouts.

Crossing the North Sea in an open boat might have been O.K for the Vikings, but modern youth demanded a roof over their heads, and a little more comfort with a galley, bunks, and toilet facilities. So we had a look around for a vessel that could offer these facilities.

We found a converted 44-foot fishing smack called Sallie which was on the market. The price was a lot more than we could afford so we then formed a committee of 4 Skippers and 6 Mates a Secretary, my wife Audrey, and a treasurer Mary Turner. We then decided that we try to raise the money by approaching local business people without much success I am afraid, apart from one person Harvey Benham the then editor of the Essex County Standard He was a keen sailor and a keen supporter of traditional East Coast sailing craft and he agreed to put up half the cost if we found the balance. By putting our own money in to the project and borrowing the balance, at a zero interest rate, we managed to raise £1,750.00 – enough to purchase the vessel.

Having purchased the Sallie we then realised that we would have to widen the use beyond just our group. So it became the Colchester Scout Sail Training Scheme, with the approval of the then Divisional Commissioner Cyril Meadows. We had a lot of opposition from a number of other senior figures in the Division, but in spite of this opposition, the scheme still went ahead.

The numbers carried in this first year was 178 trainees and spent 56 days were spent at sea. By 1976 we went up to 586 trainees and 282 days were spent at sea. This would have higher but for the fact that by then we did more longer trips.

In 1967 we obtained a grant from the Essex Education Authorities. This enabled us to pay off our debts to the good people that had given us loans.

The aim of the scheme was to take young people, primarily Scouts, to sea for a new experience in sailing and to face tough and sometimes dangerous but controlled situations.

They would also receive instruction in nautical skills, and be encouraged to take responsibility as far as their nautical skills allowed. During cruises they would also learn to live together, and work as a team in an entirely new environment. The whole experience would be an excellent character building exercise.

The aims have now developed to include formal training courses up to Yacht Master Ocean with all the associated skills that go with these qualifications.

Chapter Two - Ramrod

In 1972 we were given a donation of £3000 by Ralph Dreschfield, a well-known East Coast sailor towards a more modern vessel. As a result in October 1972 I went out to Malaga on the Spanish Mediterranean coast and purchased Ramrod – a 45ft 18-ton Class 1 one ocean racing boat – for £10,000, although at the time we only had £3000 to spend.

I told them that they would get the balance, subject to survey back in the UK, so we brought it brought back to West Mersea – to replace the Sallie.

A grant of £5,000 was obtained again from Essex Education Authorities, and with the sale of Sallie, the payment for this vessel was cleared.

It also went to replacing our ageing dory with a brand new 18-foot Cheverton work launch. Ramrod increased our cruising range enormously, and also caused a big increase in the number of trainees wanting a cruise.

The following year we took Ramrod up into the Baltic for a month's cruise, changing crews several times. This was the first time that we had carried out extended cruises so far from home.

In this year we also started a Dinghy section – with the purchase of 2 GP 14's and 2 Mirror dinghies, plus a dory for a safety boat. Also a 20ft day-boat became the schemes responsibility with the help of instructors from local Sea Scout Groups.

Chapter Three – Mersea Rival & Dinghies

In 1974, with the large increase in demand, it was decided to purchase a second vessel. As a result of this, and for £12,000.00, we purchased a Rival 34, which we named Mersea Rival, at the London Boat Show. This was priced at £18,000, so I told them that if they had not sold it at the end of the show to give me a phone call. This they did and I managed to buy for the price I had offered, complete with registration all safety equipment and down to the last knife, fork, and spoon. This purchase was made possible by a loan from the Cripps Foundation, another grant from the Education Authority, and two grants from the RYA Seamanship Foundation.

This smaller vessel enabled us to give some of our mates the opportunity of command, and thus enable us to train more Afterguard than would otherwise have been possible – in addition to giving more young people the opportunity to go to sea.

Also in 1974 I gave up my job, and became full time Manager of the Scheme. The constitution changed under the Chairmanship of Cyril Meadows Divisional Commissioner.

At the same time a new Management Committee was formed – with representatives from the Scout County including David Evans (County Commissioner). Also on the committee was Peter Gurnell (Warden of Bradwell Sailing Centre) representing the Education Committee, with Bill Brunt becoming Treasurer. The team of Skippers and Mates increased considerably – to 10 Skippers and 30 Mates.

We entered our first Tall Ships Race in this year – and have entered one or two boats every year since. Ramrod has the distinction of entering more TSRaces than any other vessel – for which a plaque was presented in 1990.

In 1977 Stan Collins took over the running of the dinghy section and he brought with him his team of Instructors from West District. We also sold the Mirror and GB14 dinghies, and purchased 3 new Torch dinghies to replace them.

We also purchased Gem a Cornish Crabber, and a 20-foot day boat called Albert and Florence for sailing in local waters.

Due to the sad death of Stan Collins, in 1979, the dinghy section suffered a severe blow. Keith Harrison stepped into the breach and ran it for a while but, owing to lack of time, had to relinquish this roll.

Chapter Four – Moonshadow & Salex

In 1980 we replaced Mersea Rival for an Ohlsan 38 named Moonshadow. That gave us a vessel with more accommodation that we needed.

In 1981 Thelma Collins took over from Bill Brunt as our treasurer. She has served the scheme ever since. Then when Chris Chapman took over the Treasurer's roll she became our bookkeeper – at the time we became computerised, and has filled this roll ever since.

1982 was a sad year for me – owing to the death of Audrey. This meant that we no longer had a Secretary and, from then on, I combined this roll with my roll as Principal.

In 1989 Moonshadow was replaced by Salex {ex Prospect of Whitby}. She was another Class 1 Ocean Racing Vessel.

Chapter Five – Tolken

In 1989 we moved into Tolken – our new purpose-built headquarters. This replaced the old, worn out, wooden workshop and store.

This new building was mainly funded by a very good friend to the scheme John Tolhurst – who also helped fund the wages of a second full-time Skipper for 3 years.

The new building gave us the whole range of facilities, sleeping accommodation, a large galley and food store, office with a telephone. This enabled us to deal with the administration in normal office hours, rather than late at night from my home – so that I then worked an 8/9-hour day instead of 12 hours.

The large workshop could accommodate a vessel up to 20 feet long, and still leave plenty of storage space for sails and equipment.

Tolken was officially opened by the then Chief Scout Garth Morrison DL, on the 4th February 1989.

This gave more opportunities to expand the Scheme still further, and it was in this year that Graham Barnes took over as Chairman from CAM.

In 1990 our good friend Ralph died, and left us a legacy in his will to set up a bursary scheme as long as we called it the Scouts Offshore Bursary.

From this, over the years, a large number of young people have benefited.

Chapter Six – Ocean Scout

In 1993, with the aid of the Foundation of Sports and the Arts plus a lot of other financial help from many other folk in smaller donations, we purchased our first 15-metre Oyster ketch.

It was a purpose built Sail Training Vessel named Ocean Scout. This was a big step forward – a 14-berth vessel, with three cabins plus a large saloon and galley, and two sets of heads.

Sadly we parted with Ramrod – who had served us wonderfully over the years. She still has fond memories for a number of us.

Chapter Seven – Offshore Scout

In 1996, with the help of Lottery money a firm called Signature and Sports Match, we purchased, a second Oyster ketch. She was called Offshore Scout – and was a sister ship to Ocean Scout.

At the same time we sold Salex – whose name reverted back to Prospect of Whitby.

Chapter Eight – Rhombus and Mersea Adventure

In 1997 we purchased Rhombus – a Hustler 30 – for Afterguard training and to run RYA courses.

Although she was an excellent sailing boat, the accommodation was not big enough to carry a full course, so it was not economically viable.

After 3 years we sold it on and purchased Mersea Adventure – a Westerly Fulmar. This we found to be the ideal vessel for the job.

Trainees carried today now total about 600 a year – making a total of 2000 trainee days.

Chapter Nine – the end of an era.

In 1999 I was awarded the MBE in the Birthday Honours list, for work in sail training – for which I share with all members of Scouts Offshore. It is they who have all contributed a lot to make it the success it has become.

I hope will continue in the future after I have gone – if it fails I shall come back and haunt you, so beware.

The day at Buckingham Palace was a highlight in my life, which I was able to share with Thelma and my two daughters.

The Queen showed quite an interest in the Sail Training work that we are doing – saying that it must be a very good way to build character in young people.

In 2000 Graham Barnes gave up the post of Chairman after 10 years in the job, and Bob Atkins took over as the new Chairman, and Penny Atkins taking over from me in 2001 will I am sure lead Scouts Offshore on to new horizons.

Ken Wright Principal for far too long.

Footnote:-

Ken retired from Scouts Offshore on 31st December 2001. Not long after retiring Ken Wright decided to move house.

The move from West Mersea to Buxton was to enable him to live closer to his daughter, and the grandchildren, who resided in that Derbyshire town.

Sadly, not long after he moved, he passed away. So he was unable to really enjoy his well-earned retirement.

His funeral took place, in Colchester, in the autumn of 2002.

Chapter Ten – the sequel.

The scheme under the chairmanship of Bob Atkins, with Penny Atkins (Manager) continued to progress steadily, with the support of the committee. From having become a group in 1966, within the Colchester District, it was in 2000 that the then County Commissioner, Barry Cousins, persuaded Offshore Sailing to take on district status. So it was that Peter Camper was appointed District Commissioner of Scouts Offshore.

Then some four years later in 2004 the decision was taken to change the District's title from Scouts Offshore to Adventures Offshore. To do this the approval of the County, the Scout Association and the Charity Commissioners had to be sought. Whilst no snags were encountered the administration took a little time – with approval being agreed.

In 2005 Penny took a decision to leave the scheme – electing to take a job in the City, working with a contact she new well. It was about this time, also, that Alistair also felt it was necessary to resign his roll – as his eyesight was causing him serious problems. So it was that Bob took on the roll of RYA Principal too.

In the summer of 2005, after some canvassing, Barry Unger took on the role of Office Manager. He was joined by his wife, Joyce, who took on the roll of Office Administrator. Office support staff came and went – due to illness and family problems. This was of some concern. However, in the summer of 2006, with an 'Islander' (Mike Davis) joining the staff things seemed to get back on an even keel.

In the autumn of 2006, and 'out of the blue', sadly Bob Atkins passed away after a short illness. His funeral took place in Bexhill-on-Sea (East Sussex) in the autumn of 2006.

Following that, and with no Chairman, Peter Camper (D.C.) found himself at the helm. It was decided that the time had come when it was necessary to take stock of the overall situation. The minutes of the meetings, at that time, will record that it was thought imperative that we required a 'distinctive' Chairman to head up an Executive Committee. So a search was initiated. The main function of that committee would be to generate funds and have overall surveillance of Adventures Offshore. The present committee's task would be simply to continue in the roll of managing the day-to-day running of the Scheme.

Mark Leggett was elected chairman at the start of the 2007 season, having long served on the committee of Adventures Offshore and as a skipper.