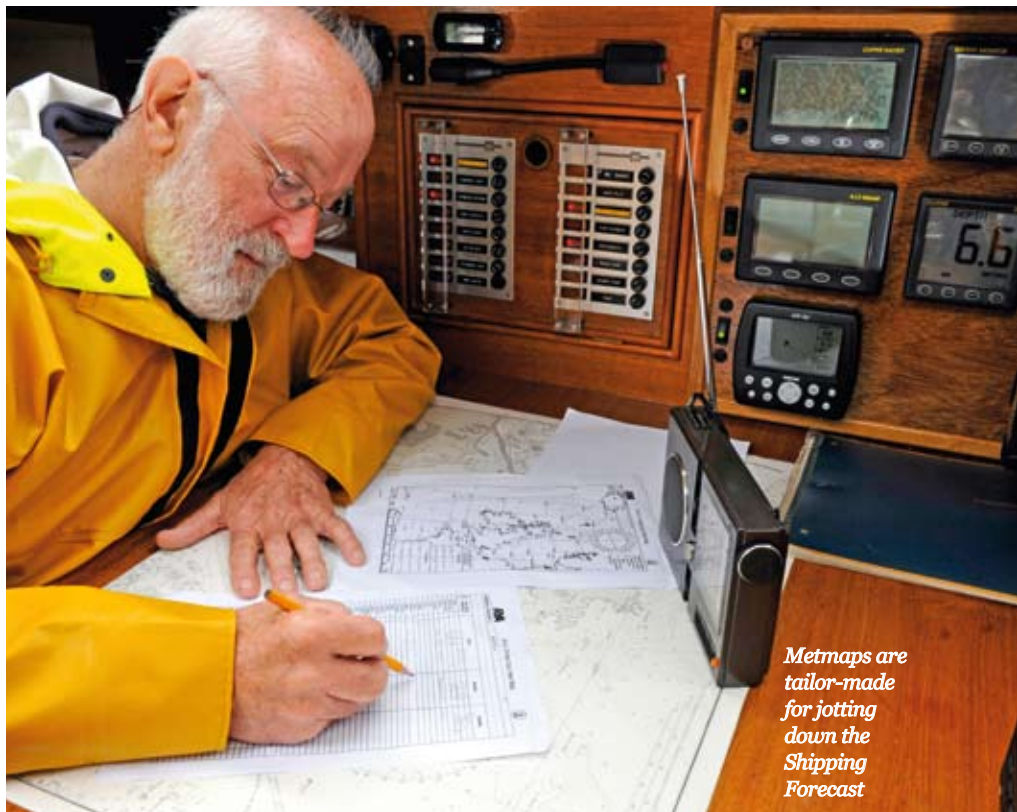




## How to get more from the Shipping Forecast

Simon Keeling on the easiest way to get all the data you need to draw your own weather charts



Winter is always a busy time here at the Weather Centre. Gone are the long forecasting days of the summer months, and in come the training sessions of the winter. Those heady days of summer have highlighted areas within a sailor's knowledge that are not quite as strong as they should be – and among the foremost of these is weather.

Now's the time of year to brush up on the skills we may have forgotten, but which might one day prove invaluable, and it's one of these, the use of the Shipping Forecast and the drawing up of weather charts from it, that I want to look at over the next couple of months. Eggs and grannies may spring to mind, but I make no apologies – sometimes we all need to go back to basics.

The drawing of isobars and fronts on a chart is an art – and it's one that we lose at our peril. That is why, over the next couple of months, I want to focus on the Shipping and Inshore waters forecast, and practice taking down the information they contain and drawing up our own weather

charts. Yes, the frequency of coastal station reports included within the Shipping and Inshore Waters forecasts may have diminished over the past few years, but the information is still broadcast and using it is a sure fire way to ensure it stays part of the forecast for years to come.

Of course, these days there is a plethora of weather information

*'Drawing isobars and fronts on a chart is an art that we lose at our peril'*

available online. You name it, you can have it, in whatever form you like. That is all very well on land, but when at sea and out of range of mobile and (for the lucky few) satellite comms, old-fashioned radio waves may be all we have.

So, where do we start? Well, a chart on which to take down the shipping forecast and to plot up the information given is vital. The famous 'Metmaps' are now free of charge and you can download them from my website ([www.sailingweather.co.uk](http://www.sailingweather.co.uk)). These provide a map and list of the Shipping Forecast areas, so you

can take down the forecasts and then draw up the weather chart.

Now you have the map, where do you get the data? You could get the forecast and coastal reports on the Internet, but the object of the exercise is to create the conditions as if we were at sea. So, tune in to Radio 4, on long wave or FM. The full forecast with coastal reports is broadcast at 0048 and 0520 BST.

The forecast without coastal reports is broadcast on long wave at 1201 and 1754.

Next, unless you are proficient at shorthand, some method of recording the forecast is useful.

Hand-held devices are ideal

for this, as are computers, or for the more traditional amongst us, a tape recorder. But why not try taking down the forecast as it is broadcast? You will be surprised at how quickly you can create your own shorthand and jot down the information in real time.

The forecast starts with the gale warning and lists all the areas in which wind speeds are expected to be at Force 8 or above. The general synopsis follows, telling you about the location of high and low pressure systems, their central pressure and how they are expected to move. The

inshore waters forecast also gives information about fronts, an ideal way of getting the first guess as to what pressure system is going to influence your sailing.

The area forecasts are next. I'm frequently asked at Weather School why it is that we need to know the winds in, say, German Bight, when we are sailing in Plymouth. The answer is that the weather we experience is a result of things happening further away, and so if we have a broad understanding of what the 'big picture' is, it is easier to produce a forecast for our area.

Coastal reports are broadcast after the area forecasts. These detail wind direction, speed, weather, visibility, pressure and 'pressure trend' for weather stations around the coasts of the UK, an hour or two previously.

Try to take down a forecast at least once every day, then, next month we will take a look at drawing up the charts – plotting isobars, highs, lows and fronts. ▲

Dr Simon Keeling's latest CD-ROM, *GRIB for Sailors*, explains how to plot your own forecast charts using free online data.

