

THE PERFECT WEEKEND IN...

THE SWALE

The route: Queenborough, Stangate, Conyer Creek, Harty Ferry & Faversham

When Britain's best anchorage lists are compiled, the Swale (that strip of sea that separates north Kent from the Isle of Sheppey) regularly ends up near the top. Why? Well, for starters it's extremely safe, with excellent protection whatever the British weather may dish up. Then there is its lack of development. There are no big marinas on this stretch of coast, just seals and wild horses, thousands of wild birds to watch and plenty of fish to catch. Not that it's all glorious isolation – there are lots of restaurants and a brewery town, too.

The surprise of the Swale is that, for all its sense of solitude, it is so accessible. From the south, you can travel up to Margate Sands then slip past Reculver and Whitstable to enter the Swale. From London, the Thames or Medway rivers allow you either to come on the outside of the Isle of Sheppey or sneak inside past Sheerness.

SATURDAY MORNING

Try to get to Queenborough on Friday night. There is a good yacht club serving hearty fare here and there's nothing like waking on a buoy to make you feel like the weekend has really begun. After a leisurely breakfast on board, it's time to put down a line and catch some passing fish before heading to Stangate Creek.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Head around the corner, go west at the east cardinal buoy and you're in deep water for the one-mile motor to another east cardinal at the entrance of Stangate. Like a marine cul-de-sac, this waterway (and Sharfleet Creek off it) is rarely busy. The anchoring is relatively easy – the lowest tide provides 16ft 4in (5.00m) at the creek mouth and 6ft 6in (2.00m) at its head – and is calm regardless of wind.

On warm summer days it's a good spot for a dip, but make sure you trail a long rope with a fender on the end – the creek may look tranquil but it's easy to underestimate the strength of the tide. Stangate is also a good bet to arrange a rendezvous with boating friends because there's nearly always space to be found. The only setback is the remoteness but just pack a cold bag of provisions with a nice bottle of Chablis and you'll be set.

SATURDAY EVENING


Return past Queenborough to spend the night at Conyer Creek. About a mile south you have to negotiate Kingsferry Bridge; when down, it has 10ft 9in (3.35m) clearance at high tide springs, so most motor boats will be able to slip underneath at low tide. At other



The 12th Century ruins, Reculver Towers, in Herne Bay are within easy reach of the Swale

PROFILE

THE AUTHOR
Tom Ben-Joseph
 Tom spends much of his boating life around the Swale and enjoys its peaceful surroundings and abundant wildlife. He has owned five boats over the years, the last of which was a Mustang M43 flybridge, built in Australia. He's also had a few liveaboard stints on yachts in St Kitts.




Getting twitchy: bird spotting in the Swale



Cruising in the calm waters of the Swale

The surprise of the Swale is that, for all its sense of solitude, it remains so accessible

1 SATURDAY MORNING



Queenborough harbour: Lord Nelson is reputed to have learnt his seafaring skills in these waters



Mural painted on the sea defences in Queenborough

2 SATURDAY AFTERNOON



Motoring towards Sharfleet Creek

3 SATURDAY EVENING



Negotiating the Kingsferry Bridge



4 SUNDAY MORNING



The orange sands at Harty Ferry, looking out onto the Thames Estuary



The marina at Conyer Creek

Georgian and Regency buildings in Faversham



Local pub life at The Albion in Faversham

FAVOURITE MARINAS

The one proper marina in the area, Swale Marina (+44 (0)1795 521562) in Conyer Creek, is great if you can take the mud. It has a good workshop and boat lift, wi-fi access, a nice clubhouse and friendly service, all at highly reasonable prices.

NAVIGATION NOTES

Rule one: check your tides and make a passage plan. This is especially true to access Conyer Creek. You run close to mudflats everywhere, so if the river shallows power back, you can reverse easily if you run aground.

FAVOURITE EATERIES

Queenborough:

The Flying Dutchman
Good food and well priced.
(Tel: +44 (0)1795 662 884)

Harty Ferry:

Ferry House Inn
Stunning views and a 16th Century country public house.
(Tel: +44 (0)1795 510 214)

Faversham:

Shipwright's Arms
A family-run, traditional pub with decent real ales.
(Tel: +44 (0)1795 590 088)

The Albion

Lovely location on the waterfront west of the creek.
(Tel: +44 (0)1795 591 411)

Posillipo

Modern Italian cooking and lots of outside seating.
(Tel: +44 (0)1795 590 580)

Prince of India

Best place for curry in town.
(Tel: +44 (0)1795 535 359)



Motor east and spot seals lounging on the flats or drop a line – the fishing here is excellent

times you may have to call Kingsferry Bridge on VHF channel 10 to raise it – be prepared for up to a half-hour wait. The Swale is an inland waterway, so the buoyage swaps sides halfway along the waterway. Entering Conyer can be tricky, but new navigation buoys have made the approach easier. At the top of the creek, Swale Marina is a modern development with a good bar and pub. It dries at low tide so time your arrival for high tide.

SUNDAY MORNING

Harty Ferry is the Swale's most popular anchorage – and with good reason. It's a lovely place to start the day, sheltered from the wind and very remote. If you don't feel like moving for the afternoon, the Ferry House Inn offers great food in an idyllic locale and has an old concrete jetty which shows at low tide. The fishing here is also excellent, especially for sea bass.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

If you do fancy more exploring, motor east to spot seals lounging on the flats of Sheppey between the Sand End and Ham Gat buoys. When lunch calls, backtrack down the Swale towards Faversham Spit. Here, two gems await. Either head towards Oare for lunch at The Three Mariners. Access is by tender from the mouth of the creek or you can leave your tender at Harty Ferry causeway, south shore, at most states of tide and walk across to Oare. Alternatively, go down Faversham Creek. It's narrow and shallow, so check there's enough depth for your boat before entering. Stay on the outside of bends and observe the red channel buoys. Faversham has a wide choice of restaurants and The Albion on the river has some moorings, although all dry out except at high tide. Still, waiting for the tide is the perfect excuse to enjoy more of this historic town.

SUNDAY EVENING

With luck, you may spot Kent's wild horses as you leave Faversham – keep your eyes peeled on the left bank as you leave. Then head back east down the Swale, between Sand Ends and Ham Gat buoys for more seal watching and perhaps a final cast of a fishing line. **IMBY**

5 SUNDAY AFTERNOON



Heading out of Faversham Creek to the Swale

6 SUNDAY EVENING



Wild horses roam alongside the Swale



Boating life along Faversham Creek

Do you have a perfect weekend?

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