

THE PERFECT WEEKEND IN...

THE WESTERN SOLENT



The route: Osborne Bay, Cowes, The Folly Inn, Newtown Creek, Yarmouth

The Solent is the unrivalled hub of UK boating, steeped in heritage and tradition be it through yacht or powerboat racing or the Naval presence which is still felt so strongly to this day. The blend of anchorages, lagoons and bustling ports is totally intoxicating no matter what type of boat you have and how you like to use it.

SATURDAY MORNING

Osborne Bay is a great place to start, granted it isn't the most sheltered of spots but it's centrally located and a cracking place to watch the Solent wake up. An early start pays dividends; this is the way to avoid the wake of passing boats whilst you tuck in to a bacon sandwich with the buzz of a Solent weekend stirring into life around you. The large bay has plenty of space to drop anchor and no real hazards except the rocks at the eastern end. Famed for being the place where Queen Victoria paddled, the same beach is now closed to landing but there is no charge for use of the bay itself. The likelihood is that sea breeze or wake will drive you away before the afternoon, the perfect excuse to slip around the headland and nip in to Cowes.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

If the Solent is boating country then Cowes is the capital city. It has a glorious beating heart that revolves around the sea. Cowes Week is a

must in your boating career, if you're lucky enough to get a berth somewhere! Sailors flood the marinas, streets and, of course, pubs as bunting crisscrosses the town fluttering in the very breeze that makes the week's yacht racing so exciting. It is this carnival atmosphere and an intrinsic link to the sea that makes Cowes such an enticing prospect for boaters. The easiest way in for a short stay is to head to the visitor's pontoon on the western side of the channel just inside the mouth of the Medina. It's a new pontoon shared with the Royal London Yacht Club and is designed purely for short stay as it's far too exposed to spend the night. Pay your dues to the harbourmaster launch and then from here you can walk along the coastal path with fantastic views over the Solent and out to Hurst Castle. Alternatively head in to the heart of Cowes town for a spot of shopping or a refreshing pint and some no-nonsense pub grub at the Anchor Inn (Tel: +44 (0)1983 292823) or a host of other eateries.

SATURDAY EVENING

You may get so carried away in the town that you search out a berth at either Cowes Yacht Haven, Shepard's Wharf or East Cowes Marina and stay the night. However, reward for venturing further up the Medina is discovering an absolute gem. The Folly Inn can be reached either by water taxi from one of the marinas further down river or by

2 SATURDAY AFTERNOON



Cowes is festooned with places to tie up

Photos: Corbis

1 SATURDAY MORNING



Osborne Bay - the perfect place for breakkie

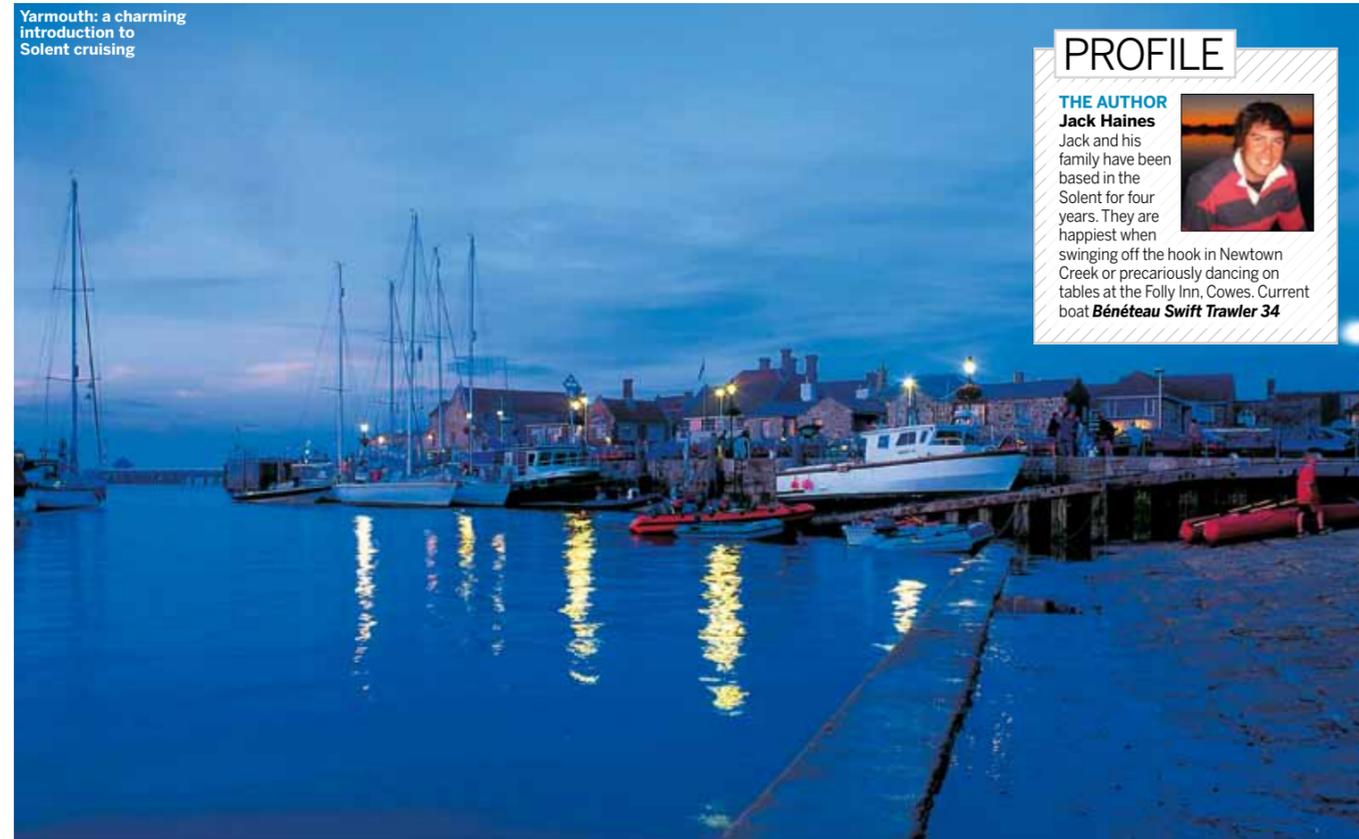
3 SATURDAY EVENING



Many a memorable night to be had at the Folly Inn



Heading to Cowes as the sun dips over the Solent



Yarmouth: a charming introduction to Solent cruising

PROFILE

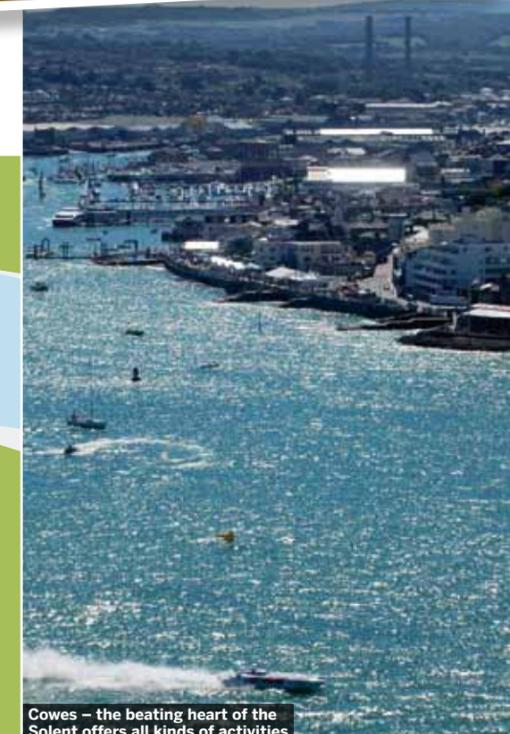
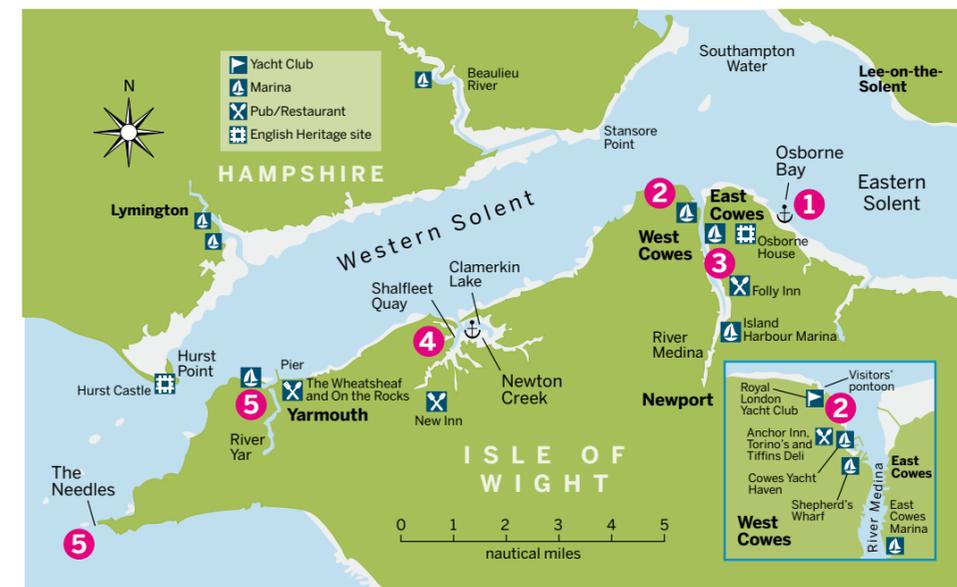
THE AUTHOR

Jack Haines

Jack and his family have been based in the Solent for four years. They are happiest when swinging off the hook in Newtown Creek or precariously dancing on tables at the Folly Inn, Cowes. Current boat **Bénéteau Swift Trawler 34**



If the Solent is boating country then Cowes is the capital city - bunting crisscrosses the street and the salty, carnival atmosphere is enticing for any boater



Cowes - the beating heart of the Solent offers all kinds of activities



The River Yare in Yarmouth is picture perfect and the town offers great restaurants

4 SUNDAY MORNING



Heaven is swinging off a buoy in stunning Newtown Creek

5 SUNDAY AFTERNOON



The Needles are a grand entrance to this unmissable cruising ground

By 10pm the whole pub will be swaying as people climb up on the tables and dance the night away

tying up to one of the various pontoons which lie on the opposite side of the river to the pub. You can fully expect to be rafted up in high season, six or seven boats out in some cases – but this is an indication as to just how good this pub is!

During the day and early evening it is simply a pub with a lovely view over the river, which serves a superb pint of the local Goddard's Ale and hearty food. By night though, local bands whip the expectant diners in to a frenzy and by 10pm the whole pub will be swaying as people climb up on to the tables and dance the night away.



Scratchells Bay on the south side of the Needles

SUNDAY MORNING

Wake up and shake off the headache with a Folly full-English breakfast then head east to Newtown Creek – a little slice of heaven. During the middle ages Newtown was a crucial commercial artery to the Solent but after the French invaded and burned it to the ground in 1377, it never recovered. What's left though is a stunningly peaceful and picturesque lagoon, which plays host to a huge variety of wildlife. Drop anchor south of Clamerkin Lake or pick up one of the various visitors buoys, although you'll be lucky to get one in high season. Anchoring costs £5 (£1 for members of the National Trust) and buoys vary depending on boat length.

In all but LW springs Shalfleet Quay is accessible by tender, from here a riverside stroll leads to the delightful New Inn pub (+44 (0)1983 531314). This is one of the best pubs in the Solent and for those with a taste for seafood it's an absolute must – fans of an ale or two won't be disappointed either.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

If it's your first time then a trip to the Needles ought to be in the itinerary. The iconic chalk cliffs and lighthouse are a sight to behold and a magnificent gateway to this revered cruising ground. If that is a little far, then Yarmouth is the perfect compromise. The first port of call on the Isle of Wight from a western approach, the sight of Yarmouth Pier is a welcome one, especially if you've had a choppy passage through a tide-ravaged Hurst Point.

Yarmouth is a delightful little harbour run by harbourmasters who ensure it runs more smoothly than Zurich airport. Tie on to a pile or take a berth on either one of the pontoons (one walk ashore, one not) then head in to the quay. The wonderfully quaint town centre has a large square where you'll find the pubs and restaurants. The George is an absolute treat if you're feeling flush, with a gorgeous garden overlooking the Solent or The The Wheatsheaf (+44 (0)1983 760456) and Bugle Coaching Inn (+44 (0)1983 760272) are two good beer, good food pubs that the Solent does so well.

From Yarmouth you could stay another night and take a wander up the banks of the River Yare or head to the myriad Solent spots that are only a short trip away. **MBY Next Month:** North Wales

FAVOURITE MARINAS

In Cowes there is little to choose between the Yacht Haven (+44 (0)1983 299975; VHF Ch.80), Shepards Wharf (+44 (0)1983 297821; VHF Ch.80) and East Cowes (+44 (0)1983 293983; VHF Ch.80). All have exemplary facilities although East Cowes is either a water taxi ride or floating bridge trip away from the heart of the action in west Cowes. Visitor's moorings are dotted along the Medina and the Folly Inn does have a pontoon (+44 (0)1983 297171). The lock-protected Island Harbour Marina (+44 (0)1983 822999) is a good alternative as you head towards Newport with the marina accessible for around 4 hours either side of HW for draughts of 1.5m.

FUEL BERTHS

The Cowes Harbour Fuels fuel barge (+44 (0)1983 200716) is south of the floating bridge and can be contacted on VHF Ch.69. Shepards Wharf marina also has fuel alongside. In

Yarmouth there is fuel alongside in the SW corner of the harbour.

FAVOURITE EATERIES

In Cowes, as well as the aforementioned pubs, Torino's Italian (+44 (0)1983 298464) offers a refreshing alternative to pub food whilst Tiffins delicatessen (+44 (0)1983 292 310) is a great place to grab a freshly made baguette or coffee and cake.

In Yarmouth, On the Rocks (+44 (0)1983 760505) is good fun with the family or if there's a big group of you. The menu consists of fantastic cuts of lots of meat and fish served to you atop a searing hot rock upon which you cook the food to your liking.

NAVIGATION NOTES

The Solent is famous for its extremely complicated double high tides. As well as detailed charts of the area, tide tables are a must if you wish to cruise safely here.

The Solent can become extremely congested with all sorts of craft. Watch out for the Red Jet cat and Wight Link car ferry in Cowes. In Yarmouth, if the car ferry is in, beware of getting up close and personal with its bowthruster, which kicks out an almighty wash.



Watch out for the Red Jet high speed cat