RESCUE - 16 AUGUST 1992

Note on boat which you may like to include.

"Walkabout" was a 33 ft wooden cutter in which Mike Saunders and family sailed from Mozambique to England via the West Indies. Walkabout II is a heavy displacement long keeled Buchanan cutter, 45 ft LOD, designed to meet Mike Saunder's requirements for long distance cruising with a minimum of maintenance, ease of handling and good sailing performance with a 'fair wind.' LOA (bowsprit) 52 ft, LOD 45 ft, beam 13 ft, LWL 36 ft, displacement 2Ø tons, powered by 65 hp Leyland engine.

I have been sailing for twenty years and became the owner of Walkabout II approximately seven years ago with every intention of sailing the worlds' oceans when time and money permit .....?

Walkabout remains much the same as when I purchased her, 'improvements' being limited to electronics and batteries (my speciality), hot and pressurised water systems, shower and a more substantial coal fire, which keeps us cheerful in the winter.

Walkabout has only made one substantial voyage in my ownership, and that was from Lymington to la Coruna and return for Yacht Master Ocean two years ago. Although immensely successful, 1,5ØØ miles in three weeks, I have not, as yet, found time to correlate and submit the sight reductions, which I am sure will have time expired by now.

On the weekend including Sunday 16 August (my 5Øth birthday), Pat and I decided to take ourselves away for Saturday and Sunday, with fishing in mind for Saturday night (we can manage the boat perfectly well on our own; it just takes about half an hour to get all the sails up and set).

We left our berth in Lymington Yacht Haven at approximately 173Ø hours on Saturday with every intention of finding one of those large conger eels which live under the flat rocks in Alum Bay (Isle of Wight).

The weather seemed settled, the wind was from the south and I vaguely remembered the 135Ø forecast indicating force 3 or 4 and veering later.

We settled in Alum Bay, with roast chicken, roast potatoes and vegetables for dinner followed by blackberry and apple crumble with fresh cream (all cooked on board).

I started fishing at approximately 21ØØ hours with every intention of staying the night. The fishing was not terribly encouraging although we did catch enough for breakfast. It became very overcast and began to rain heavily. At this point Pat went to bed and I half heartedly continued fishing. The rain even defeated me at 2345. The wind had shifted to the south west and increased considerably. "Walkabout" was two cables from a lee shore with an uncomfortable swell and snatching quite heavily at her anchor chain. Although Pat was sound asleep, I could not settle under those conditions and opted to hear the midnight 33 forecast reasoning that perhaps the wind was only caused by the squally rain. The forecast was, as before, force 4, SW veering westerly and decreasing later. A glance at the anemometer indicated 24 knots of wind, gusting 3Ø-31 knots. A quick check of the tide times indicated enough of the spring flood left to take us through Hurst Narrows just before the ebb tide, approximately fifteen minutes from 'anchor up'. We planned on spending the night in the anchorage on the eastern side of Hurst Castle.

I woke Pat, her tasks are to keep the boat pointing at the anchor with occasional bursts of engine, and poking the chain in the chain locker to prevent it piling up into the hawse pipe. My unenviable task, to wind in (mechanical only) 6Ø metres of 3/4 inch chain and an 8Ø pound CQR anchor.

At this point everything is normal underlined just for that reason. The boat was cluttered with various ropes, items of equipment not conducive to sailing, worms and cut bait, gutted fish; a fishing rod complete with hooks laid carefully on the starboard side of the deck, and a hand held searchlight. The searchlight runs from the boat's batteries; used in this instance for illuminating the fish whilst landing them. There is always a white flare to hand from the cockpit. Pat was just wearing light clothes and an oilskin; similarly myself, though better clad because of the fishing. For what we expected to be only a fifteen minute trip for two miles with some tide assistance, neither of us considered wearing life jackets or safety harnesses as we would be in the cockpit all the time (Walkabout is equipped with a flat tape for fixing safety harnesses which runs unimpaired from the bowsprit to the cockpit).

As we left Alum Bay the visibility closed down in the rain, such that I could not see either the lights on Hurst Castle, two miles away, or the NE Shingles Cardinal one and a half, or Warden, one mile. My navigation was partly "pilotage" (2Ø years knowledge of these waters), partly DR and Compass, and confirmation from Decca's Lat/Long. As we passed through Hurst Narrows the rain had stopped, but it was completely black, sea and sky the same colour with no horizon or indication of any shore feature other than lights. We passed through Hurst Narrows approximately two cables from Hurst Castle. We proceeded approximately two cables past Hurst in an easterly direction looking at the masthead lights in the anchorage and deciding where we might "join in".

I shut the engine to a tick over and turned NW to run in considerably behind the anchored vessels when we heard the cry for help, time Ø11Ø approximately. We immediately turned to investigate travelling approximately SE towards Yarmouth IOW and searched the water with the spotlight. We sighted a capsized red hulled sailing boat, almost completely awash with one person at the stern. When we asked if he was alone, he shouted "No, my wife and child are at the bow," and their faces appeared at that end of the boat.

Instinctively I knew their lives were in immediate danger.

I stopped Walkabout, told Pat to keep them in the spotlight at all costs and went below to transmit a Mayday Relay and turn on the deck lights, Ø115 approx. The response from Solent Coastguard was immediate, as was Pat's call that they were drifting out of range of the light.

I gave Solent Coastguard the position from Decca, nature of the emergency, and told them that I had to go.

The boat, which was a Wayfarer, looked very much larger than life. The Spring tide had now turned with a vengeance; we were being swept at 4 to 5 knots in a swirling tide race. The wind was now over the tide, still at approximately 3Ø knots, the worst of the race was still some distance from us.

It was imperative that we must maintain station with the dinghy and inevitable that we travel with it under way without making steerage way, through the race.

I unhooked my horseshoe Life Preserver and flashing light from its ready position adjacent to the cockpit and threw the preserver to the casualties where

it would indicate their position if we lost contact. It missed them by one metre and they were unable to reach it. Within half a minute it was out of sight, being taken by the wind and the swirling current.

Pat and I now fully realised that we only had one chance at everything.

Right or wrong it had to work or lives would be lost. Equally, there was no time for either of us to even think about safety harnesses.

Our immediate requirements were:

1) maintain station at all costs, and

2) get a line on the dinghy.

We had now entered the worst part of Hurst race. The casualties and their dinghy were being swept completely by breaking waves; we prayed that they could all hold on. The boat looked like a large torpedo that could hole us. Walkabout was lifting her bows completely out of the water, then plunging until the bowsprit smacked on the next wave. I knew that if Walkabout hit them it would kill them. If they got anywhere near the propeller they could lose limbs, or if Walkabout tangled one of the trailing ropes in her prop we also would be a casualty. In any case, their lives could be lost.

It was very difficult to maintain station; apart from the waves, the swirling eddies were trying to spin Walkabout around. The pitching was so severe that on more than one occasion the propeller (4'6 under) broke surface when in reverse. The resulting cavitation briefly caused total loss of power right when it was really needed.

Because Walkabout has a transom hung rudder directly in the prop wash the stern can be kicked in any direction almost before she gathers way. Because she is tiller steered I was able to stand on the cockpit seat, hold onto the boom (safely in its crutch), steer with one foot, boot the gear lever, as necessary, with the other and with my spare hand hold the spotlight while I sent Pat off to find a 60ft warp, make it off amidships and throw it to the casualties. It took a few throws before it reached them.

From the start of the incident I have no recollection of time; however, as soon as the husband (Mark Smith) had made the line off to his forestay (all 60 ft out), I briefly called the Coastguard to ask what was happening (Yarmouth Lifeboat and helicopter launched). They asked if we had recovered the casualties yet!

Back on deck immediately. Disaster - the current is setting us onto the Shingles! The source of many yachts foundering under similar conditions.

I implored the casualties to hang on for their lives while I quickly mentally plotted a course vector which would ensure we went into the north head passage and would, at least, avoid the shallows and a possible grounding.

I put on absolutely the minimum amount of power necessary. Pat was particularly tortured watching the little boy's head going under water often.

When I had established we were out of danger, I put the engine in neutral and we set about recovering the casualties.

The rope was very tight because the wind was blowing Walkabout which was, in

turn, towing the dinghy (a fact that did not dawn on me until considerably later). We dare not let the rope loosen for an instant, so took it over the lifelines to the Genoa winch and immediately produced riding turns. We then managed to get a bight over the transom and on the main sheet winch. Fortunately, the lie of the rope was now okay and we winched the dinghy to within ten feet of the transom and Pat threw another looped line down to the casualties. Mark Smith gave this to his wife whom we pulled to the boarding ladder amidships. To our horror, she appeared not to have put the loop over her shoulders, merely held on to it (possibly, because she did not have the strength). In any case, she discarded it immediately she gripped the boarding ladder. It was apparent that she had no strength at all and no use of her lower limbs. Pat and I reconsidered the "one chance only" routine. If she let go she would almost certainly have been lost, as we would have had to stay with the other two (father and son). Walkabout has approx 3'6" (1.1m) freeboard amidships. Nonetheless, Pat and I reached down, taking one wrist each, and bodily pulled her over the lifelines on to the deck where she stayed without moving.

The south west wind had blown Walkabout well inshore by now. We asked Mark Smith and son Michael, age 6, to hang on while we towed them out to sea about two cables more. After this Mark then put the loop around his son, and passed him down the line, where I reached over and 'fielded' him on to Walkabout. He, too, lay motionless on the deck while Pat threw the line again to Mark. While Mark was putting this around himself she quickly retrieved a blanket from below and put the kettle on. Michael was moved into the cockpit out of the wind and wrapped in the blanket.

Pat then helped Anna down below, helped her undress and got her into the hot shower, then rushed up to help me get Mark in, after he had cast off the dinghy. Once Mark was alongside, we passed the main halyard down and he was able to connect it to the loop. Pat tailed (Oh, for self tailers!) whilst I wound. It was a very slow process. When his knees were nearly level with the top lifeline he said that he could not hold his arms down any more and gradually began to open up, a process which meant he could be lost. The wind had set Walkabout very close to the shore. Pat rushed to him, held on to the back of his waistband and tried to pull him towards the boat, hoping he would be able to lift at least one leg over the lifeline and the other would come automatically. I tailed and wound the winch.

At a critical point, we got him over the lifeline. I let go the main halyard and sprinted for the cockpit for forward gear and maximum power at the point where Walkabout seemed to be almost at the breaker line.

I cleared the danger area. Mark was beginning to recover and helped Pat to get his son down below. Together they took the boy's clothes off and rubbed him down with a towel. At this stage he was protesting, which was a good sign. (His mother was still in the shower waiting to be helped out). Pat put the boy into a sleeping bag and wrapped a duvet around him as well and put him in the bunk for the time being until she could get help to put him in the shower. Then Pat helped Anna out of the shower and helped her to get dressed while Mark went in. She also made them a hot drink.

Whilst all this was going on I called the coastguard; they needed to hear from me, as the lifeboat and helicopter had been searching the main Needles Channel for half an hour, whilst we were nearly two miles from our first reported position. Quite simply, we had not had time or a spare hand to communicate!

I set the boat for "home" on autopilot and used a white flare to confirm our

position to the lifeboat and helicopter. As I needed two hands I threw the flare over the side. I knew it would not go out but had not thought it would sink! I set off another and held on to it until the lifeboat was within hailing distance. Because of the sea state the lifeboat could not come alongside without risk of damage. They very professionally fielded a crew member on to my transom, deciding that the "winch man" on the helicopter had to decide the best course of action. As the boy was slipping in and out of a coma the lifeboat launched its rubber dinghy, took them one at a time on board and transferred them via the helicopter to St Mary's Hospital, Newport, IOW, from where they were released on Sunday afternoon.

They had been in the water for three hours before we found them.

At Ø33Ø hours Walkabout II signed off with the Coastguard and we proceeded to our intended anchorage.

When we surfaced at approximately 1Ø3Ø hours the next day, we felt particularly honoured to see the lifeboat, which was on exercise, come over to us to thank us personally for saving three lives.

Some suggestions which could have been a help:

1) When you throw the life preserver and flashing light, it is really a two handed job as the weights and trajectories are different. The aim is not accurate. If some means could be found of holding the light to the preserver until impact with the water, the critical "3 feet miss" may have made all the difference!

2) "I threw the flare into the water and it sunk." Whilst this is rather stupid, on my part, surely there is a case for a flare that floats, possibly in an expanded polystyrene collar?

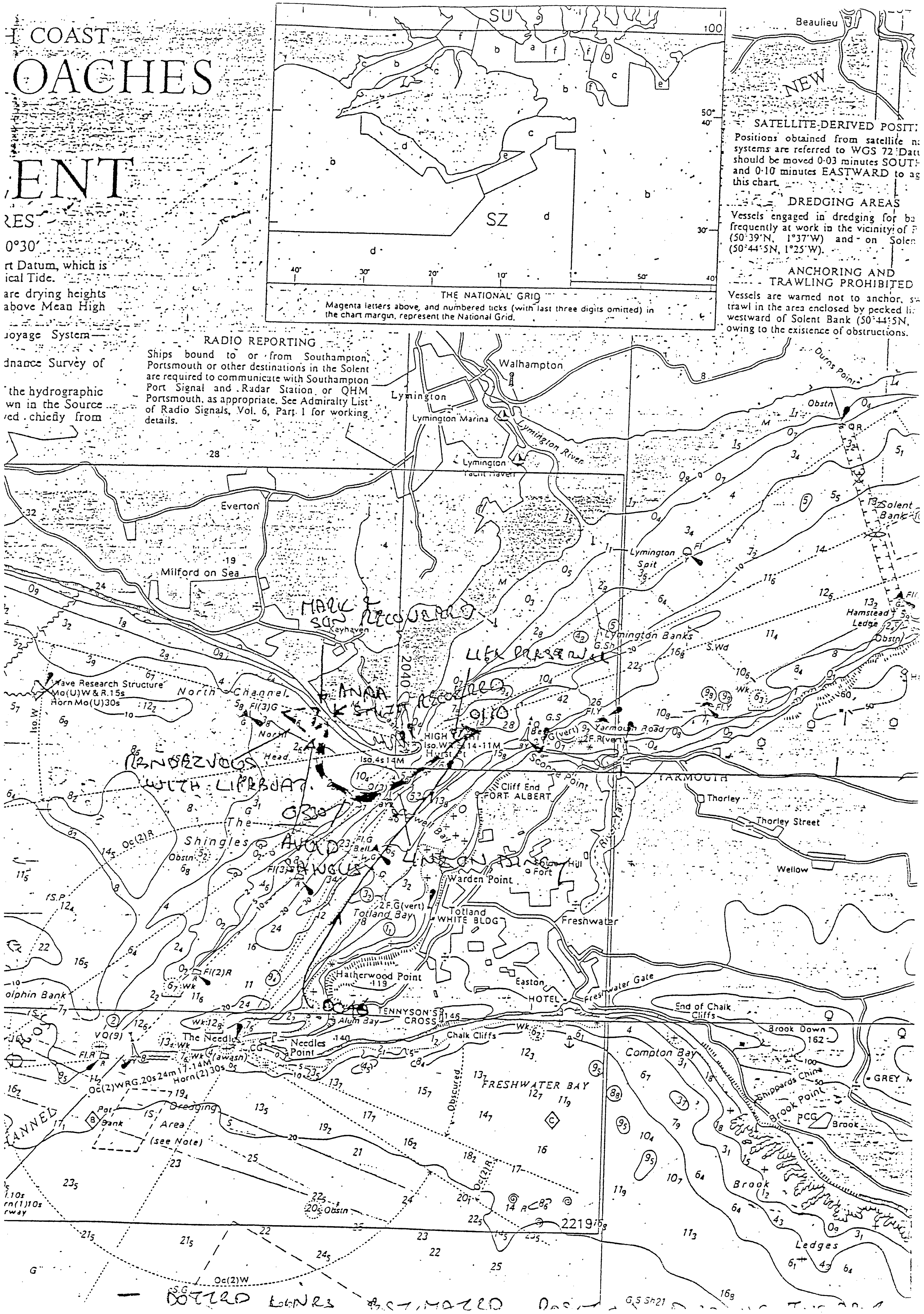
3) When considering replacement flares, I immediately thought of a possible modification to the "Pains Wessex" type which would render it more easily usable in the dark. (You probably cannot see the instructions, let alone carry them out).

Enclosures:

1) Chart marked with positions and incident details

2) Sketches of flare suggestions

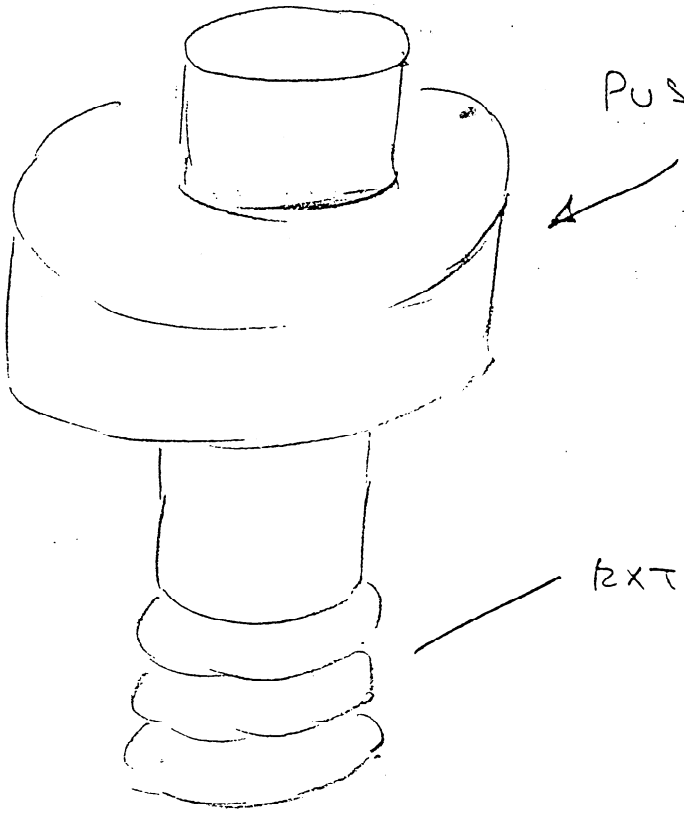
MIKE J FURNESS



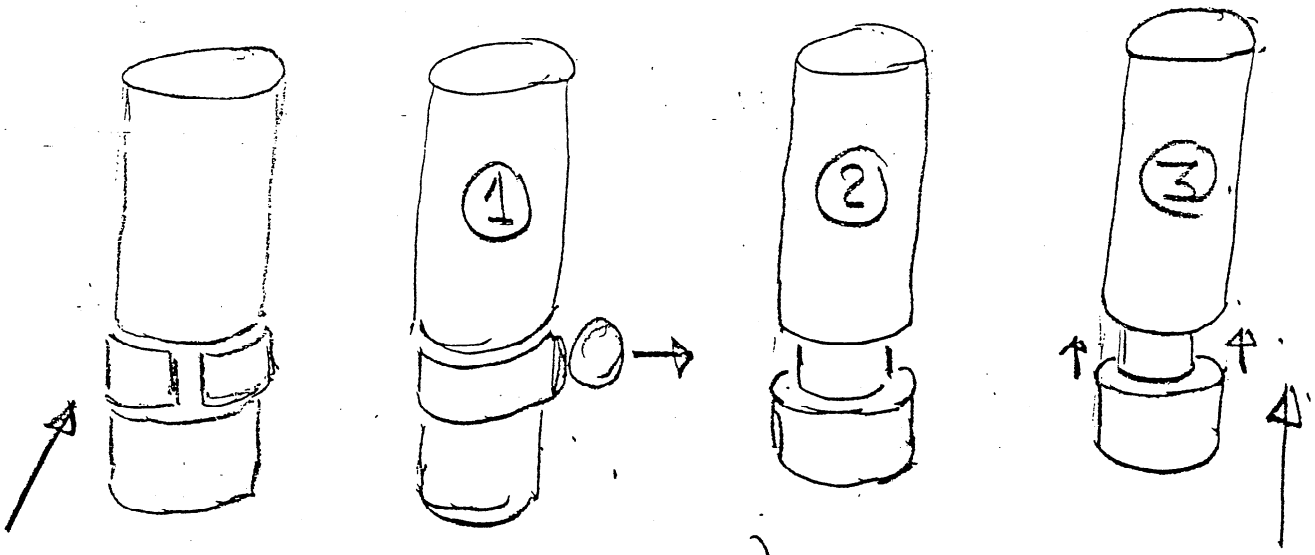
COAST
OACHES
ENT
RES
0°30′
rt Datum, which is
ical Tide.
are drying heights
above Mean High
uoyage System
dnance Survey of
the hydrographic
wn in the Source
ved chiefly from
THE NATIONAL GRID
Magenta letters above, and numbered ticks (with last three digits omitted) in the chart margin, represent the National Grid.
SU
SZ
RADIO REPORTING
Ships bound to or from Southampton, Portsmouth or other destinations in the Solent are required to communicate with Southampton Port Signal and Radar Station, or QHM Portsmouth, as appropriate. See Admiralty List of Radio Signals, Vol. 6, Part 1 for working details.
SATELLITE-DERIVED POSITI
Positions obtained from satellite na systems are referred to WGS 72 Datu should be moved 0·03 minutes SOUTH and 0·10 minutes EASTWARD to ag this chart.
DREDGING AREAS
Vessels engaged in dredging for ba frequently at work in the vicinity of F (50°39′N, 1°37′W) and on Solen (50°44′5N, 1°25′W).
ANCHORING AND TRAWLING PROHIBITED
Vessels are warned not to anchor, s trawl in the area enclosed by pecked li westward of Solent Bank (50°44′5N, owing to the existence of obstructions.
Beaulieu
NEW
Walhampton
Lymington
Lymington Marina
Lymington River
Lymington Yacht Haven
Everton
Milford on Sea
Keyhaven
Lymington Spit
Lymington Banks
Solent Bank
Hamstead Ledge
North Channel
North Head
Wave Research Structure
Hurst Pt
HIGH LT
Iso.WR 4s 14-11M
Iso.4s 14M
Yarmouth Road
YARMOUTH
Thorley
Thorley Street
Wellow
Cliff End
FORT ALBERT
Colwell Bay
The Shingles
Warden Point
Totland Bay
Totland
WHITE BLDG
Freshwater
Hatherwood Point
Easton
HOTEL
Freshwater Gate
End of Chalk Cliffs
TENNYSON'S CROSS
Alum Bay
The Needles
Needles Point
Chalk Cliffs
Compton Bay
FRESHWATER BAY
Brook Down
Shippards Chine
Brook Point
Brook
Ledges
GREY
Dolphin Bank
Pot Bank
Dredging Area (see Note)
Oc(2)WRG.20s 24m 17-14M
Horn(2)30s
Oc(2)R
Oc(2)W
Obscured
2219

ENCL 2.

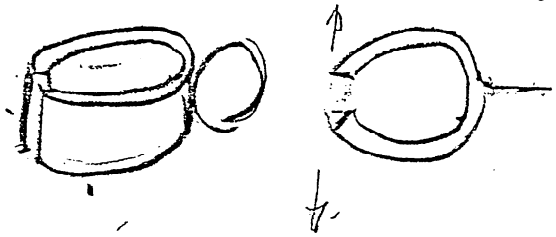
SUGGESTED FLARE OPTIONS.



BASE STRIKING FLARE TYPE.
SIMPLIFIED. (PAINS-WESSEX).



TIGHT FITTING CIRCLIP TYPE PLASTIC COLLAR.



1) PULL OFF COLLAR. WITH RING PULL.
2) FLARE ARMED.
3) STRIKE BASE.

MIKE J. FURNESS.