

A Passage Planning Checklist – by Steve Schlemmer

Here's a list of prompts that I keep in the back of my log book onboard *Fantome*. It comes from various sources and arises from a number of lessons I've learnt at sea over the years. I add to it from time to time. There are plenty of books, videos and guidelines that will give similar, and probably more comprehensive, tips. Some of these are available from the Drascombe shop and library.

1	CHARTS	10	COURSES
2	PILOT BOOK	11	TACTICS
3	WEATHER	12	BOLT HOLES
4	TIDAL STREAMS	13	FOOD AND DRINK
5	OFFLYING DANGERS	14	CLOTHES
6	TRAFFIC SEPARATION SCHEMES	15	HARNESS
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Before I set off on anything more than a short inshore hop I look at this list to check that I'm prepared. In poor weather or marginal conditions I run through it even for short inshore passages.

You will see that it is from, and for, a non-electric, pre-GPS sailor. No apologies are offered for this. Perhaps an electronic Drascombe sailor might like to add their views

1 CHARTS - have charts for the area of your passage and for anywhere you might end up. Look in detail at your likely track and any possible diversions. What navigation buoys, lights or distant features will be in sight during the passage?

2 PILOT BOOK - have a pilot for the area and read up on the headlands to be passed, the entrance to your destination and any likely bolt holes.

3 WEATHER - have at least one shipping forecast to cover the time that you'll be on passage and an inshore forecast if appropriate. Set an upper limit on wind strength for setting out **before** you hear the forecast. (I don't set out in Force 5 or above.) Preferably listen to forecasts for two or three days before leaving to understand the developing weather patterns. Plan an off-the-wind passage.

Drascombe Rule 1 (but see Rule 2 below): ***Drascombe sailors never cruise to windward except for fun on short trips when the sun is shining.***

Think what the sea will be like after the weather over the last few days.

4 TIDAL STREAMS - look at the tidal streams from a tidal atlas or from the chart diamonds. Sail with the tide. A knot of tide with you in a Drascombe can halve a passage time compared with a knot against you.

Drascombe Rule 2: ***Drascombe sailors never cruise to windward against the tide under any circumstances.***

If the tide is across your track, will you allow for it, or is there space to ignore it and be carried up and down? What courses will you set to be sure to arrive, hopefully up-wind, but definitely up-tide of your destination?

If the tide is along your track, are there any tidal gates at headlands or other features that must be passed before a certain time or not arrived at before a certain time.

5 OFFLYING DANGERS - look at the chart and the pilot book for any dangers or discomforts that are not close to visible natural features. How will you plan to give them a wide berth and, more importantly, know that you have?

6 TRAFFIC SEPARATION SCHEMES - do you need to cross a separation scheme? How will you plan to cross safely without being in the way of bigger vessels?

7 TIDAL HEIGHTS - what's the state of tide when you leave and when you arrive and at any likely bolt-holes at the time you might be there? Can you sail straight in or will you need to wait, if so, given the weather and tide, where can you safely anchor? If you plan to dry out overnight, check tomorrow's heights as well to avoid being neaped.

8 DAYLIGHT - when is sunrise and sunset? Will it be light when you arrive? Can you arrive early in the morning after using lights to help your landfall? If you plan to arrive, or might arrive, in the dark, be sure you know the lights that will help you in.

9 PASSAGE PLAN - now make a passage plan. Write it in your log. To keep your options open call it 'Passage towards ' Also, put the key points for reference in your deck log. I use a plastic board and chinagraph pencil in the cockpit and put passage plan details on the top for easy reference while underway.

10 COURSES - write out the compass courses to steer, and distances to run, between features allowing for variation and any deviation. If you plan courses to allow for cross-track tides, check the effect of being earlier or later than planned.

11 TACTICS - what might change your plans and how will you react, I believe the army calls this 'Actions on

e.g. 'Action on being headed by the wind backing from NW to SW earlier than forecast: tack on to port and head N for Fowey.' E.g. 'Action on wind falling light and boat speed dropping below 2 knots: start motoring no later than 1800 hrs to arrive before dark.'

12 BOLT-HOLES - if you do need to divert to an earlier, off-track destination, be sure you know how and when to make your entrance. Don't ignore the potential of unusual shelter to wait for wind or tide. There are all sorts of traditional shelters around the coasts

that are rarely used today. Read some Victorian or Edwardian sailing books to see where our less well-equipped ancestors rode out adverse conditions.

13 FOOD AND DRINK - regular food and appropriate hot or cold drinks keep a crew happy, operational and safe. If, like me, you sail singlehanded, you might want to prepare food and drinks before you set off. I prepare something to have every hour when I make up the log and I keep the supplies in reach from the cockpit. Practice heaving-to for a short break or to boil a kettle.

14 CLOTHES - conditions at sea can vary considerably over a few hours, make sure that all the clothes you'll need are to hand including: a warm jacket, gloves, oilskins, boots, sun cream, sun hat and so on.

15 HARNESS - do you have a ship's rule for when you will wear life jackets or harnesses? If, like me, you don't wear them all the time, make sure they're to hand should you decide you need them.

16 CABIN AND DECK - stow or secure the things below assuming that you will be sailing your beloved Drascombe on her ear in the roughest water you've ever encountered. Particularly check the securing of heavy objects including the battery and fuel tanks and the stowage of breakables.

Make sure you have everything on deck that you need for navigating, sailing and motoring, for example the log if it's not permanently installed. Check that the main fuel tank is full and that reserve cans and funnel are to hand. On the one hand, check that everything you want to keep on board can't go overboard e.g. oars, boat hook, dinghy, anchor, and that you can stow warps and fenders as you leave. On the other hand, check that anything you might want to throw overboard like the dan buoy, lifebuoy or boarding ladder is ready to deploy.

Check that your harness attachments or lifelines are fitted.

If you are planning to, or might have to, sail at night, check any torches, cabin, deck or navigation lights you'll need.

17 REEF? - finally look at the sails and rig. Are the sails ready to set, the sheets free to run, is the wind strong enough or gusty enough to require setting off with one or more reefs? Better to set off with a reef and shake it out later than to have to reef soon after leaving.

18 REPORTS - and finally, if you think of anything during the passage, or if you break something or if you notice that something needs fixing, or if you want Plymouth Gin not Gordon's on the next trip, or if you think of a new heading for your passage planning checklist, write it in your deck log. You won't remember it when you arrive.

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