



Prawle Point

No: 37

'eyes along the coast'

Autumn 2010

VISITOR CENTRE AT PRAWLE POINT - OFFICIAL OPENING -

The afternoon of September 7th was one of sunshine and celebration for NCI Prawle Point when the newly refurbished Visitor Centre was officially opened by NCI Chairman, Jon Gifford, and Sam Hunt of the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Station was dressed overall, ribbons were cut, Friends of Prawle Point, otherwise known as the FOPP ladies, circulated with wine and nibbles and speeches were made to the 40 guests gathered in front of the Lookout. Throughout, duty officers continued their watch with normal vigilance and expertise while introductions and explanations of watchkeeping, equipment and procedures carried on around them!

Jon Gifford congratulated the Station Manager on a superb achievement after hours of hard work obtaining the grant and carrying through the many tasks involved in such an ambitious project. He praised the hard work and dedication of watchkeepers who keep the Station manned for 365 days of the year and thanked those present for their practical support. Station

Manager, Roger Barrett gave special tribute to Deputy Station Manager and Maintenance Officer, Derek Venables who keeps a low profile yet makes an outstanding contribution of time, knowledge and practical expertise while encouraging his volunteers with kindness and appreciation. Roger also thanked the local builders, D.R. & P. Thuel as well as the many representatives from local organisations for their invaluable work and support of the impressive transformation of the Visitor Centre. Sam Hunt,

committee member of the Heritage Lottery Fund, made special mention of the relaxed, friendly atmosphere he discerned within the Station and was impressed by a tangible optimism and enthusiasm. Councillor John Baverstock, Chairman of South Hams District Council spoke of his memories as the first Station Manager at Prawle Point when a strimmer was needed to clear a way to the doors of this neglected ex Coastguard building in 1997. A cheque for £800 was presented by Frances Leer, Chairman of FOPP. She and her team were also thanked for giving a telescope, now mounted in the Visitor Centre, and their many continuing gestures of support.

The building, originally a Second World War generator room smelling strongly of diesel, has been transformed beyond recognition and the initial impact, on opening the door, is impressive. Vivid maritime colours on walls and floors, bright lighting, simple, well-made plain

wooden benches and a highly co-ordinated series of display panels make a most welcoming first impression. Visitors will now be able to gain a wide view to seaward through the new observation window, follow progress of shipping on a radar screen, on the chart table and through the newly installed telescope and even consult a weather station for current local conditions. Incidents, in which



NCI Prawle Point has been involved during the current year, are listed chronologically, National Trust stewardship of the area is explained and walkers can consult a walking map of the Prawle and Beesands area. The display panels, professionally produced by Devon Wildlife Enterprises and Freeline Graphics, provide a wealth of information providing a most attractive facility for coastal walkers and an inspiring learning resource for young visitors. Six panels with highly informative text and stunning photography cover 'Looking Out to Sea' with

images of local features and oft-sighted vessels, 'Wildlife' depicting with amazing colour definition and close detail, the abundant flora and fauna of the area, 'Prawle Point's Place in History' showing shipwrecks, battles, archaeological discoveries and the history of the station as a Lloyd's Signal Station and coastguard base plus early stages of NCI occupancy. A panel entitled 'Looking Out for You' shows the Search and Rescue involvement of Lifeboats, Coastguard Rescue teams, Rescue Helicopters and the Air Ambulance and explains the 'Eyes and Ears along the Coast' ethos of the 43 NCI stations now established. 'Shaping the Coast' covers the fascinating geology which has formed this magnificent coastline and 'Walking the Coast' gives stunning views for walkers enjoying this beautiful section of the South West Coast Path.



Local organisations who offered support and visual material include the National Trust, Devon Wildlife Trust, Devon Bird-watchers, Devon RIGS Group (Regionally Important Geological Sites), National Trust, South Devon AONB, Brixham Seawatch, Salcombe Lifeboat, Start Point Lighthouse, SW Maritime Archaeological Group, SW Coast

Path Association, Slapton Ley Field Studies Centre and Salcombe Maritime Museum.

All this has been made possible through an award of £16,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund which recognised the unique natural, cultural and historical importance of this beautiful southernmost point of Devon. The Visitor Centre is open whenever Prawle Point Station is manned and admission is free.

Jenny Brown

CETACEAN PROTECTION



I set up Brixham Seawatch in 1990 in order to monitor and protect cetaceans around our shores and to address the dramatic decline in certain species, mainly Common Dolphins, who were dying in large numbers as a result of fishing net entanglement.

We have fought long and hard to prevent these terrible deaths by bringing about changes in the fishing industry and introducing legislation. However, the years have shown what we know to be true; we just do not see nowadays, large, awe inspiring sights of huge numbers of Common Dolphin speeding along the English Channel chasing mackerel, their favourite food. Anyone seeing these magnificent spectacles will have marvelled at the joy and excitement as they race in tight groups squealing and clicking to each other. If only we had known how privileged we were and how quickly these mesmerising occasions would cease!

However, twenty years later, with the scene totally changed for ever, there is hope. This is where NCI stations give invaluable help. Diligent observations and reports of sightings provide information giving a clearer picture of our inshore marine environment. This year in particular, has shown more sightings than ever of Basking Sharks, Sunfish and Harbour Porpoise, but most exciting of all, has been the almost daily sightings of 'our,' now well known, pod of Bottle Nosed Dolphins, ten to twelve in total, with the addition this year, of a new calf. We have known and watched this group for three years and worry if they disappear for a while. The arrival of the baby caused particular anxiety because of increased marine traffic. Many

cases of pleasure craft, going too fast and too close to Bottle Nosed Dolphins, were noted. An incident of harassment reported by NCI Prawle Point was most upsetting and, once again, brought to light the importance of 'eyes and ears' along the coast in protecting marine mammals. The public needs to be aware of legislation for apprehending and prosecuting offenders. Fortunately people are generally more understanding, educated and appreciative of the marine world with all its problems. For many people, encountering dolphins in the wild (the only true way) is a magical, uplifting experience and an encouragement to learn more of their habits and need for protection.

Saddening, however is the fact that, even with more people involved in the monitoring scheme, sightings of cetaceans have dropped dramatically. Particularly affected are Pilot Whales which, only fifteen years ago, were seen in vast numbers in the Channel. A fisherman once phoned to report passing Pilot Whales for over half an hour! I could tell from his voice he was affected by that once in a lifetime experience. Common Dolphins also have struggled against every adversity. The by-catch problem of Bass pair trawlers has had grave effects, many thousands being lost every winter. It is a heartbreaking task to deal with bodies, see the terrible injuries, remove them for post mortem and note how healthy and beautiful they were prior to death.

Brixham Seawatch thanks all involved in the sighting and protection scheme. Your vigilance, care and support are vital. Only with continued help can we ensure a safer and healthier future for all our marine friends.

*Lindy Hingley MBE
Brixham Seawatch*



Friends Of Prawle Point

Cream teas were provided at the Parish Hall in East Prawle in support of the annual Open Day when visitors could examine displays depicting the work of NCI Prawle Point and take a trip to the Lookout to observe a Watch in action. The foul weather favoured the former, where FOPP ladies managed to raise £320, but put a damper on the latter.

The Opening of the Visitor Centre, on September 7th, was greatly enhanced by FOPP's provision of wine and nibbles. Chairman, Frances Leer took the opportunity to present Station Manager, Roger Barrett with a cheque for £800 resulting from the 2010 Antique Six Jazz evening.

Another jazz evening with the incomparable Antique Six is fixed for June 18th 2011.

A Christmas party will be the next event organised for friends, watchkeepers and partners on December 14th.

NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



02.10.10

When the NCI watchkeepers overheard Brixham Coastguard calling the Hope Cove Coastguard Rescue Team regarding a walker with an injured leg on the cliff path at Starehole Bay, they located the casualty by telescope. They then gave the grid reference and details of her position relative to local features, as well as details of what was happening on scene, to Brixham CG. After the Rescue Team arrived the casualty was taken to Derriford hospital by ambulance.

01.10.10

Brixham Coastguard requested Prawle Point watchkeepers to keep a close eye on two canoeists leaving Salcombe Harbour towards the Bar, after having received a call from a concerned member of the public. Over the next 40 minutes watch-keepers monitored their progress and gave 4 position updates to Brixham. The canoeists later returned safely to Salcombe.

26.09.10

When Motor Launch *Louise I* sent a PanPan message saying she was taking in water at the stern, the NCI watchkeepers noted her position and reported to Brixham Coastguard that they had the casualty in sight. Salcombe Lifeboat was tasked and when the Coastguard lost radio comms. with the lifeboat they asked the watchkeepers to report her position. The casualty later beached at Hallsands.

24.09.10

A RIB on passage from Dartmouth to Salcombe was kept under close surveillance by Prawle Point watchkeepers at the request of Brixham Coastguard. Regular position updates were given.

28.8.10

After the RIB *Whistler*, with 8 people on board, reported engine failure to Brixham Coastguard, the Prawle Point watchkeeper advised the Coastguard that the RIB was in sight and gave details of craft in the vicinity able to assist. One of these, another RIB, took *Whistler* in tow and the watchkeeper provided the Coastguard with regular updates until the casualty was towed into Salcombe by the Harbourmaster's launch.

25.8.10

Prawle Point watchkeepers were asked by Brixham Coastguard to keep a look out for the motor cruiser *Voodoo* which had reported having one engine disabled. However, because of poor visibility *Voodoo* could not be

seen and there was no radar trace. After reporting hearing *Voodoo* on VHF Channel 16 without reply from the Coastguard, the watchkeepers were asked to call her up on Channel 16. Three calls were made without a response but a nearby yacht was able to establish radio comms. with *Voodoo* and report that she was making for Torquay.

22.8.10

After Brixham Coastguard received a VHF Channel 16 Yacht *Dorwynd* reporting partial engine failure, the Coastguard contacted the Prawle Point watchkeeper who was able to confirm *Dorwynd's* position and provide updates when the Salcombe Harbour Launch came out to take her in tow.

08.08.10

Prawle Point watchkeepers relayed to Brixham Coastguard a VHF radio call from motor cruiser *Challenger* reporting a fire in the engine compartment and then provided regular position updates until Salcombe Inshore Lifeboat arrived on scene and towed the casualty to Salcombe for a damage assessment.

01.08.10

After yacht *Hannah* reported engine failure by VHF radio when off Bolt head, Brixham Coastguard requested the duty watchkeeper to monitor the casualty. Position updates were given until the casualty, which was under sail and bound for Plymouth, was out of view.

29.7.10

Duty watchkeepers witnessed the harassment of dolphins in Salcombe Range by 7 motor boats and 2 dinghies and reported their concerns to Salcombe Harbour Master and Brixham Coastguard after the dolphins showed signs of distress. The harassment of dolphins is illegal and the reports will be followed up by the authorities.

28.7.10

Soon after opening the watch at 9am on 28 July, the watchkeepers received a request from Brixham Coastguard to look out for a yacht, *Appledore Belle*, which was returning from the Channel Islands to Salcombe without power. At 9.30 the watchkeepers sighted *Appledore Belle* 7½ miles off Salcombe and reported her visual. During the next 3 hours they provided the Coastguard with information including position updates. The yacht was then towed into Salcombe by the Harbour Master's launch.



NCI Estuary Cruise on the 'River Maid'

On a windy, gloomy, overcast evening of 10th September about 60 NCI Prawle Point watchkeepers, family and friends gathered in Kingsbridge to board the River Maid for a cruise on the Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary. Unfortunately, not all passengers were assembled where they needed to be to board the boat but following dashes along Embankment Road by some and lifts in cars to get the slower ones to the boatyard quay, we were all aboard.

The writer, who had volunteered to give a wildlife commentary, welcomed everybody and explained what birds it might be possible to see. Conditions were not ideal though; the light being so poor that any detail, including colour, was going to be difficult to discern. However, ever the optimist, we proceeded to make our way down the estuary and were able to pick out some waders on the western shore towards Gerston Point - I think they were Redshank - and some Little Egrets, standing like white lights, on a fallen tree near the entrance to Collapit Creek. A pair of Mute Swan were seen in the distance but their reported cygnets were not visible.

As the *River Maid* made its way across Widegates the force 6 south west wind was keenly felt by outside passengers (did some move inside out of the wind?). The expected high tide that evening was 5.6 metres, only the previous evening's 5.7 metres exceeding it, so the only evidence of the Saltstone was the marker post. In going down the Bag the skipper, Malcolm Pope steered the vessel east of the Island Cruising Club base where we observed a small flock of Oystercatchers roosting on a pontoon. These flew off as we approached, to reveal their

black and white plumage and red bills. In among Black-headed Gulls on another pontoon were one or two Sandwich Terns but the gloomy light made identification difficult.

As we progressed south of Scoble Point and into Salcombe Harbour we passed many of the local crabbing boats that watchkeepers keep an eye on from Prawle Point, but now moored for the night. Some of them did look small! As the



River Maid moved towards South Sands the swell coming over the Bar became more pronounced and the skipper thought it advisable to turn the craft round. This was unfortunate as the cruise had been advertised as including seeing the NCI station at Prawle Point from the sea. Oh well, perhaps next year.

On the way back up the Estuary Malcolm chose to venture up South Pool Creek which, with the

approaching high tide, made an interesting detour. Some waders roosting on a small shingle spit were disturbed as we approached which enabled differentiation in flight between Greenshank, with their dark wings and white wedge up the back, and the smaller Redshank, with the white trailing edge to their wings.

We wondered how far up the creek the skipper was going to take us because we had ventured beyond the pontoon in South Pool and were almost by the bridge before the boat was turned round, with extreme care! It was quite an experience. By now it was almost dark as we cruised down the creek and up the estuary to moor alongside the boatyard quay and we disembarked with the high tide lapping over the quay wall.

Despite the weather and not being able to venture beyond the Bar, the consensus among passengers was of an enjoyable cruise, so please, can we repeat it next year?

Jim Bennett

SOME COMMON SAYINGS OF A NAUTICAL ORIGIN

- Bearing up* Bearing up into the wind to avoid a situation or obstruction but not a comfortable procedure.
- Cut and run* Drastic action to get a ship quickly under way by cutting either the mooring rope or securing lines on furled sails.
- Free and easy* A ship is moving free when sheets are eased- a relatively relaxed state of sailing with the wind aft.
- Carried away* Broken yards, masts or ropes due to violent weather thus reducing control.
- Touch and go* A hull touching the bottom but then freeing immediately from a potentially difficult situation.
- Booby prize* A tropical seabird, named the Booby, was prone to perch on the rigging or land on deck so could easily be caught for the pot.
- In the offing* Part of the sea from coast to horizon is called the offing, hence a ship in this area may be making landfall.



Please help us to maintain this valuable service by making a donation and becoming a supporter of NCI Prawle Point or becoming a watchkeeper.

*Please contact: The Secretary, NCI Prawle Point, Kingsbridge, PO BOX 58 TQ7 2QZ
Station tel. no. 01548 511259 www.nci-prawlepoint.org Cheques to NCI Prawle Point*