



Gilbert Park's Raymarine chart plotter, iPad and iPhone in his Seaward 25

# 800 miles by iPhone

After gaining his Yachtmaster credentials, Gilbert Park puts theory into practice on the water – with the navigational aid of an iPhone

**I**n April of this year, I passed my Yachtmaster theory exam. It involved a lot of hard work and was quite challenging, but it was ultimately very satisfying to gain an understanding of tides, navigation, weather and Colregs. Nevertheless, I knew that experience at sea would be required to make the theory learned in class stick in my mind and be directly applicable.

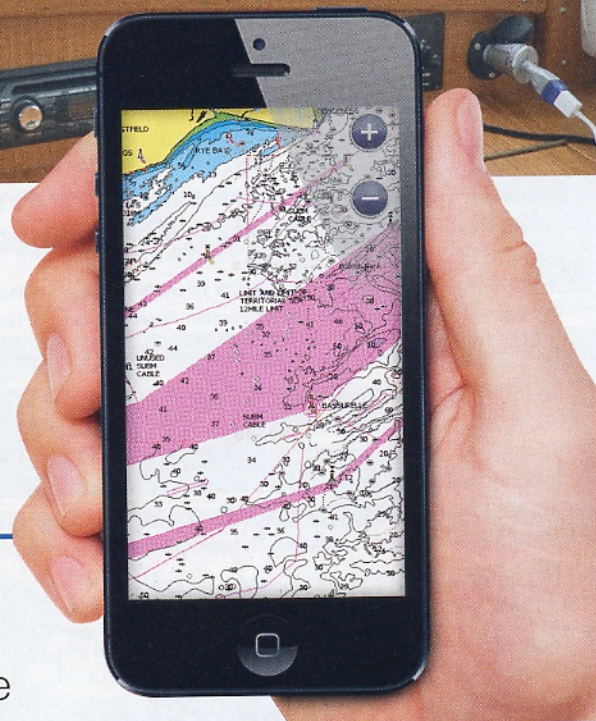
To this end, I booked a course with an instructor to take me out and teach me the practicalities of being a Yachtmaster, but at the last moment the school cancelled the sessions, leaving me with booked holidays and a boat but no crew, as my wife had

prior arrangements. I mentioned this dilemma to my Yachtmaster teacher and asked if he wanted to accompany me on the water – and to my surprise, he agreed to do so.

So it was over the first May bank holiday that we set off from Emsworth in my Seaward 25, en route for a night crossing to Alderney. At least, that was the passage plan I had spent the week preparing. However, the forecast indicated a Force 6 to 7 with a moderate sea, so we stayed put on a nearby pontoon with the intention of trying again the following day. The weather was still unfavourable for a Channel crossing then, though, so we made for Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight, where improving conditions led us to plan a revised night passage.

With pilotage duly written and lifejackets on, we set off at 0230. We radioed a passage plan to the coastguard and had an uneventful crossing, arriving in full sunshine and no wind to speak of. The next day we undertook a circumnavigation of Alderney, with lunch and a man overboard drill in the Race: great fun.

Although we had planned another night passage for our return, a forecast of deteriorating weather meant we left Alderney early, with some detailed pilotage for the Nab Tower area in the Solent. The anchorage was full, so we decided to go around it: some confusion followed as to how many cardinals there were in the area. The paper charts showed none around the tower itself but the electronic chart showed two – which turned out to be right.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gilbert Park has been sailing for more than 40 years and has worked his way through almost the entire Drascome range. He now has a Seaward 25 motor cruiser and enjoys the tinkering and maintenance that goes with owning any sort of boat.





## Delivery trip

A couple of weeks later I was asked if I was interested in crewing on a delivery trip from the UK to Norway, a distance of roughly 800 miles, over the last May bank holiday. I jumped at the chance. The boat was a nine-year-old 40-footer, spacious and comfortable, and skipper Kevin was very experienced at making such deliveries.

An 0500 start saw us leave the Solent and make a gentle trip across the Channel and up to Holland. Although the boat had a chart plotter and radar, and we also carried charts and pilot books of the relevant areas, our preferred method of navigation was to input the route on an iPhone with a Navionics chart and follow it by setting a course on the autopilot. En route, Kevin was checking the deteriorating forecast on his iPhone using [www.weatheronline.co.uk](http://www.weatheronline.co.uk). The wind was increasing, as was the wave height, and the wind direction was changing to be on the nose.

The plan for the following day was to make for the duty-free island of Helgoland, so another early morning start was called for. Consulting weather charts on the way, conditions around the top of Holland looked to be worsening, so we sought refuge on the small island of Borkum.

The next day, a trip inshore of the islands at high water (the timing of which was confirmed via the iPhone) piqued our interest, navigating by withies with red tape around them as port markers: these were even shown on the iPhone's Navionics chart. Once outside the shelter of the islands the sea picked up at first, then settled down as the wind died – as the forecast predicted!

Helgoland was a quick refuel and off again, followed by another refuelling stop in northern Denmark. We encountered fog with visibility down to 200m en route, but Kevin decided not to slow down as this was an isolated part of the North Sea, it was night, and there would only be commercial shipping around which we would see on the radar. After a brief stop in Denmark it was off to Norway, seeing the sunrise over a glassy sea and refuelling from jerrycans. Roughly 180 miles later, we arrived in Stavanger.

## Informed decision-making

The details of each trip aren't so important: what mattered was the decision-making by two very experienced sailors in changing conditions, and the information their actions were based upon.

With the Alderney crossing, my RYA instructor helped me prepare detailed passage plans and follow the weather for some time beforehand. Pilotage plans were prepared for each section of the trip – unless local knowledge was used – and the weather outlook obtained from Radio 4 long wave and coastguard forecasts. To the instructor's delight, the chart plotter on my boat showed heading, course and drift (a combination of tide and wind), making it easy for me to relate to the theory he had taught me. Information on tides and the like was obtained from *Reeds Almanac*.

The delivery trip was different. We knew where we starting from and where we were finishing, and the skipper had plied this route many times before. Nevertheless, the concept of just using an iPhone for navigation – without recourse to the paper

chart we had on board, or a Breton plotter, or *Reeds* – was totally alien to me. All the charts and tidal information were on the iPhone: no internet connection was needed for this information. For weather forecasts the internet was required, but connectivity was easily obtained several times a day. Having access to such up-to-date forecasts gave a degree of flexibility and the ability to quickly respond to changing conditions.

Both sailors occasionally used the VHF, and in the event of an emergency there was not only the inbuilt DSC radio on each boat but also a DSC handheld, an EPIRB and a liferaft.

## An invaluable asset

Two days after my return from Norway, I was back on my own boat with an encouraging weather forecast. My original plan was to go to Bembridge on the Isle of Wight from Emsworth for the first night, then go to Brighton for the rest of the weekend. Two-thirds of the way down the Channel, my wife suggested we just go to Brighton! No passage plan had been prepared for this, although I did have a passage planning chart, a pilotage book and the chartlets in *Reeds* as well as the up-to-date charts on my chart plotter and iPhone.

By looking at detailed online tidal streams (available on an app called Boatie, and checked in *Reeds*) I could tell the sea would be calm. I could follow the route on the iPhone from my side of the boat, at whatever zoom I wanted, as my wife had the helm and thus the main chart plotter: she could check that no problems awaited us at whatever zoom she wanted, plus or minus radar. We arrived without incident – I didn't even have to leave my seat.

At 0530 we received a telephone call with the sad news that my wife's father had passed away. We now had to plan how to get her to Ireland as soon as possible, and I had to work out how to get the boat back alone. The iPhone proved invaluable in passage planning: I bought the relevant paper charts that morning and travelled back having looked at them, but following a route inshore of the cardinal markers that was six miles shorter.

## Still a place for paper

I still can't do the overall passage planning on a screen, however. I need a large paper chart to plan with, and then transfer that information to the iPhone or chart plotter. Also, as I go along I still like looking at a paper chart to see where I am. I also think a larger screen may be better: so my iPad 1 is being brought out of retirement. If nothing else, with a pair of headphones I can view movies when off watch.



Scandinavian style: the coastline view sailing up the fjord towards Stavanger