



## NCI Gwennap Head – Incidents and News 2020

### Jan-Feb

- For the last 15 years or so, Gwennap Head's primary spotting device has been an old pillar-mounted set of 100mm x20 binoculars (which were second-hand when donated!). Whilst functional ('ish), they were certainly showing their age and, for the last few years, there was always an aspiration to replace them. Unfortunately, such a purchase was always out of our reach, and so we soldiered on with what we had.

Recently, we were fortunate enough to receive a legacy donation specifically for the purchase of new spotting binoculars and these have now been installed. They are made by APM, have a magnification of 37x120 and give fantastically clear and bright images. When you look through them, you realise just how good modern optical devices really are and how much of an asset they will be to us, day-to-day. Because of their high magnification, the eyepieces have a smaller field of view than lower-powered ones. Thus, to make it easier to find small targets on a big ocean, they come with a Red Dot Finder aiming device. Basically, put the red dot on your target and the binoculars are automatically pointing at it – can't get much simpler than that!

- This morning, a bit of a surprise for our watchkeeper when they opened the watch at 7.30am – instead of one cardinal buoy (marking the Runnel Stone rock spike) in its normal position, one mile offshore, there were now two cardinal buoys happily bobbing around in the heavy seas (blowing 60mph, gusting to 80mph). After a bit of head-scratching and some quick chart work, our watchkeeper established that the 'visitor' was actually the Carn Base buoy which should (!) have been positioned some 3 nautical miles to the South West of its current position. Presumably, it had broken free during the previous night's storms and was now engaged in a marine version of The Grand Tour around our local waters. Falmouth Coastguard were swiftly informed about the errant buoy and its current location. In turn, they informed Trinity House (who are responsible for maintaining lighthouses and navigation buoys around our coastline), issued a *Sécurité* warning message to all local shipping and requested our watchkeeper to maintain observation on the buoy and informed them of any changes in position. So far, the buoy has shown little inclination to move on but, due to sea conditions, I guess it might be a couple of days before Trinity House can get to it and 'take it back home'!

### Mar-Apr

- In light of the pandemic, our National Board of Trustees issued the statement, below. Sadly, along with our colleagues throughout the country, Gwennap Head watch station will be closed until the current Coronavirus situation has been brought under control. We are desperately sad that it has come to this but, as the statement says, many watchkeepers either fall into high-risk categories or care for others in the vulnerable groups. As such, safety considerations must be paramount. We will reopen as soon as possible but, in the meantime, if you're out on the water or cliffs, please be extra careful and mindful of your surroundings

#### *Statement From The NCI National Board of Trustees*

*The Board of Trustees of the National Coastwatch Institution has reluctantly made the decision to suspend all current operations because of the ongoing Coronavirus situation.*

*As from midnight tonight (Wednesday 18th March) all NCI stations will suspend watchkeeping duties and will remain closed until further notice. The charity which runs 56 lookout stations*



# National Coastwatch

## EYES ALONG THE COAST

*around the coast of England and Wales reporting to HM Coastguard, is staffed by over 2600 volunteers many of whom fall into the age category identified by the government as being most at risk. Watches at the lookouts will be resumed as soon as government guidelines permit.*

- Sadly, in view of the current nationwide coronavirus situation and, after taking advice, regrettably, we have decided to postpone our Big Race Night charity fund-raising event. on March 27th. We are sure that this is a disappointment to you all. However, we hope to reschedule this event for later in the year. Thank you for your understanding
- Many apologies to anyone who's been trying to access the live feed from our weather station over the last few days and has been getting no information. After surviving the worst that this winter weather has been able to throw at it (including wind gusts of up to 112mph), it would appear that it's finally thrown in the towel and stopped working. We're not sure whether the problem is terminal or fixable since, to find out, our Premises Officer needs to venture up onto our roof. Strangely enough, he's not keen on clambering out onto a roof, on the edge of a cliff, in 30mph winds so fault-finding will have to wait until the weather calms down a bit (could be a while given the weather, so far, this winter!). In the meantime, if you need to know what the weather is doing at Gwennap Head, please give the station a ring during working hours and our watchkeepers will be only too happy to provide you with a report on current weather conditions.

### May-Jun

- GOOD NEWS....WE'RE BACK! It's been a long eight weeks but, after considering the UK Government's recent slight relaxation of the lockdown rules, our Board of Trustees has authorised the re-opening of all NCI stations in England. At Gwennap Head, we plan to restart our watches on Monday 18th May, at 08:00 and then maintain our normal year-round visual, radio, radar and AIS Watch (BST: 08:00 – 18:00, GMT: 08:00 – 16:00). As always, we can be contacted by telephone (01736-871351) or by VHF radio (marine channel 65) for information about weather, local conditions and, of course, to report sightings of incidents (potential or otherwise). Sadly, as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 situation, and in an effort to reduce the risk of infection to our watchkeepers and their families, we are still obliged to keep our watch station closed to visitors. This action in no way affects our day-to-day operations and we will strive to continue our duties as normal. Of course, if you don't mind getting a slight crick in the neck, you can still chat to us from ground level when our watchkeepers are out on the balcony. We appreciate your understanding and continued support and let's hope we all stay well and get through this unscathed, as soon as possible. Thank you.
- We're Back...And So Is Our Weather Station! Gwennap Head is happy to announce that not only are we back on watch but, at long last, OUR WEATHER STATION HAS BEEN REPAIRED and, once again, you can view a live feed from it, 24 hours a day, at [https://weatherfile.com/location?loc\\_id=GBR00026](https://weatherfile.com/location?loc_id=GBR00026)

Apologies for the somewhat prolonged absence but, until recently, the weather was not conducive to clambering on roofs, at the edge of clifftops, in order to conduct fault finding and [eventually] dismounting before sending the unit off for maintenance. Many thanks to the guys and gals at Richard Paul Russell for their sterling efforts in getting weather station fixed and returned to us during this difficult time

### Jul-Aug

- When the fog is down and all that can be heard over the howling wind is the mournful sound of the Runnel Stone buoy, Gwennap Head can feel like an eerie place. So, imagine the feelings of our watchkeeper when, on one such morning, from out of the fog, they heard an approaching



# National Coastwatch

## EYES ALONG THE COAST

clanking, wheezing, roaring sound. West Cornwall is the land of legends so maybe they could be forgiven if thoughts of Madgy Figgy, Cormoran and even the Ghost Ship of Porthcurno flitted through their thoughts (see <https://www.nci.org.uk/stations/legends> for more about our local myths).

The sounds came closer and closer..then, out of the fog emerged.....well, see for yourself [here](#)

Definitely not our normal passing traffic but, hey, it takes all sorts...and, of course, you can't beat a tractor cab for social distancing

- Climbing Restriction Currently in Operation -Yes, it's that time of year, again, when the thoughts of lady & gentlemen choughs turn to romance, a semi-detached nest of their own and the flutter of tiny wings Like all newly-weds, a bit of privacy is appreciated so, if you're one of those people who like dangling on ropes over long drops (!), please be aware that a Schedule 1 Nesting Birds Climbing Restriction, from Laceration to The Mitre, is currently in place until the 15th July 2020. More information on the UKC and BMC web sites. Your cooperation is much appreciated

### Sept-Oct

- Windsurfer Rescue- At the lunchtime watch-change briefing, our watchkeeper was informed that a windsurfer who had originally set out from Portsmouth in an attempt to sail around the coast in stages, was, that day, continuing his trip, departing from Penzance. Later on, our watchkeeper observed the windsurfer who, when he was abeam of Porthgwarra, beached his board and walked up to the lookout to investigate what the sea conditions were like between Gwennap Head and Land's End. He then informed our watchkeeper that he would proceed from Porthgwarra but probably only sail as far as Sennen as there wasn't much wind and he doubted that he could make St. Ives before nightfall (always wise to let a third-party know of your intentions)

Subsequently, our watchkeeper saw him sail past the lookout and everything looked fine. However, approximately 20 minutes later an urgent call was received from the surfer on VHF Channel 65 (the NCI's dedicated VHF radio channel) saying that he'd capsized and needed immediate assistance. Although he didn't actually use the proword (i.e. procedure word) "Mayday", our watchkeeper immediately phoned Falmouth Coastguard (FCG) and passed on details of his predicament, along with the fact that he had a visual sighting on the windsurfer, ¼ mile west of the lookout.

FCG hadn't heard anything from the wind surfer and our watchkeeper suggested since that he was right under the cliffs and only had a hand-held VHF, he was probably screened from them. Nevertheless, our watchkeeper contacted the windsurfer and suggested he make direct contact with FCG via a "Mayday" on VHF channel 16 (the 'Calling' channel).

He did this and although the signal was received loud and clear in our watch room, nothing was heard by FCG. Consequently, they then requested we stay in contact with the windsurfer via Channel 65, and with themselves via the telephone, whilst they launched the Sennen Cove AWLB "City of London III" to the incident. Our watchkeeper then maintained a comms relay between the windsurfer and FCG until the lifeboat arrived, retrieved the windsurfer and his kit and then took them both back to Sennen.



# National Coastwatch

EYES ALONG THE COAST

Good cooperation between our watchkeeper, FCG and Sennen lifeboat plus the fact that the windsurfer was well-equipped for his journey (including a hand-held VHS radio) all led to a speedy recovery and a good end to this incident.

- To Start With, A Modern “Can We Have Our Ball Back, Please”! Our watchkeeper had an ‘interesting’ afternoon watch, yesterday! A large group of climbers were climbing various routes on the Chair Ladder - the sea cliff in front of the watch - which, I’m told, is “one of Cornwall’s and indeed the UK’s, premier crags” (don’t ask me...I get a nose bleed just standing on a step ladder!). They were also using a drone to get aerial shots of their daring-do and, at one-point, lost control of it, resulting in a crash landing on the back roof of our watch room, followed by a rather shame-faced “Can we have our drone back, please?” Naturally, our watchkeeper was happy to oblige, albeit with suggestive glances at our donations box (as a local charity, we’re totally funded by the public and, in common with many other charities, the lockdown has hit us hard).

However, half an hour before the end of the afternoon watch, things took a much more serious turn when one of the climbers injured themselves after slipping and falling from a route. A 999 call was made from our landline (mobile reception is dodgy, here) and a major rescue operation was launched, with Coastguard rescue teams from Penzance and Land’s End, both Sennen lifeboats and the Coastguard Search-and-Rescue helicopter, being mobilised. Eventually, the casualty was winched up and airlifted to hospital and our watchkeeper was able to finish his shift...2 hours after the watch should have closed....as in all NCI stations, no one clock-watches when an incident is ongoing!

-----