NEW FOREST SAILABILITY

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2026

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service
The MBE for volunteer groups

Charity no: 1210484

Chairman: Malcolm Bentley

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Dates for your diary: 2026

9 July– TT Race at NFS

7 December—Christmas lunch

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

With the terrible weather we have had over the winter, it would have been a miracle if all the maintenance had been completed by the time we started sailing. I understand that there has been a lower than usual turnout by our volunteers this winter—very probably partly because of the weather—and some of our equipment is getting old so needs additional work by those qualified or with the relevant experience. However, it does seem that all of our 303s have been checked, cleaned and had all the relevant bits/ equipment put back in. I did, of course, have every faith in our Bosun team and volunteers!

I do know that the pontoons have been given a good wash—although that may not have stopped the geese using them for their personal "bathrooms". To counteract the bird poo problem, we have bought a new improved jet washer but there are still a couple of issues with water supply. A new large water butt has been ordered and should arrive soon.

I also understand that Steve Kitson (2025 volunteer of the year), with help from others, has repurposed the old "H" pontoon to use as a ramp for Tango and it is now in use. Hopefully that will make loading the boat for trips around the lake easier. A big thanks for making the power boat drivers and loading helpers lives easier.

Also, another big thanks to our maintenance team and all the volunteers who give up their time and expertise in the depths of winter to keep us up and running. Having said all that, I am sure that anyone who wants to help with maintenance in winter and throughout our sailing season will be welcomed with open arms.



General discussion



Specific issue?



Good de-brief

Following the Powerboat Training and Safety Boat qualification, we now have a bigger pool of powerboat drivers. I know that when I first gained my powerboat qualification, I was keen—OK desperate—to have time driving the boats and keep gaining experience. I do hope that the new drivers will be given that opportunity and perhaps we can sort out an informal rota to make sure everyone gets more time, confidence and skills on Jaffa and Tango.

As always a big thanks and acknowledgment to Chris Wales for most of the photos.

Rowena Marsh

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN—MALCOLM BENTLEY



We should be into our second week of the sailing season when this newsletter comes out and after our AGM and two training days. These were well attended by volunteers and particularly the power/safety boat drivers for whom refresher training is mandatory with 25 out of the 28 volunteers with PB2 being there.

This is an essential opportunity to emphasise the key points on how we operate both our Safety Boat and power boat trips around the lake, such as manning, qualifications, buoyancy aids versus self-inflating lifejackets, passenger/wheelchair numbers etc. and answer any questions/dispel myths.

All volunteers are encouraged to take every opportunity to practice their skills. The PB/SB courses are stepping stones to becoming well experienced drivers and there is no substitute for time on the water and practicing scenarios. If you wish to drive, just mention this to the OOD.

We continue to enhance the membership, check in and Board computer systems and displays. Mel Yates has done a considerable amount of work before the season on this and we now have both Sail and Power Boards that are largely self-populating and the Power trips more automated to allow easier management of those waiting and readily shown on the big monitor for sailors and carers to see.

Our first sailing day on Tuesday 7th April was brisk to say the least, particularly the gusts rushing across the lake, and demonstrated the importance of skippers using their discretion as to whether to sail and being sensitive to the appetite of their passenger, some skippers and passengers are rightly cautious, others love a bit of a blow.

FROM OUR TREASURER—ANDY HOLMES



At our AGM two years ago it was agreed that we should become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation commonly known as a CIO. The conversion process was put in motion and by September 2024 we had registered a new CIO charity called New Forest Sailability which in time would replace New Forest and District Sailability. By August 2025 we had opened new bank accounts and obtained the Charity Commission's agreement to transfer all the cash and ownership of the boats, pontoons, shed and equipment to the new CIO charity. All the assets and control of the sailing operation was transferred to New Forest Sailability in August last year. After operating for 25 years New Forest and District Sailability will be now wound up.

One of the main reasons for becoming a CIO is that its trustees and members are not generally personally liable for the charity's debts and obligations as they were previously with New Forest and District Sailability. It is hoped that this limited liability will help us recruit new trustees due to the lower personal financial risk.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON RACE TRAINING

The race training sessions continued during the 2025 sailing season. The training could not occur every Thursday afternoon for a variety of reasons—no wind, too much wind, rain, holidays, lack of safety boat cover. There was also the inevitable weed which seemed to spark a discussion which involved sharing this photo with the comment by Tim Worner "It was Bill & Ben who had little weed".



No—no idea either.

Those sessions which did occur were well attended with around 8 to 10 people, including sailors, safety crew and general helpers (or dogsbodies as Ian Park calls them!). There were a fair few practice starts but also the odd drill or challenge such as overtaking from astern. Each session included some racing and post race discussions—with a fair bit of "banter"! Certainly the times I managed to get along, there was a discussion about who had managed to get Tim Worner wet yet again. But it seems that he was not the only one as Ron Harrington was planning to go home for a bath after one session in late September only for his team mate to make sure he had one during the race sailing! I only wish I had a photo of that afternoon!

From a safety boat perspective Paul Cooling commented that Mandy and he learnt a lot from the skippers eg: course setting; levels of endurance and how many times boats need to be reminded of the course set! There was clearly a problem with the starter hooter, with a WhatsApp discussion continuing over several weeks and I think that eventually a new hooter was purchased—or at least the moaning and whinging on to Paul on the WhatsApp group stopped!

It also seems that the weeks I could not attend, Yve made some cakes—can you make sure that I can attend those sessions next season please Yve!

It is certainly a fun afternoon and open to those who might not want to race but who do want to improve their sailing skills. It is also a way to support our sailors and volunteers who do want to learn more.

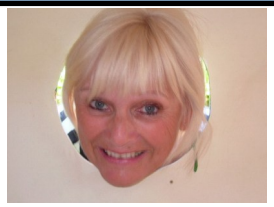
Some of the photos from last season.







CLOSER LOOK – AT A VOLUNTEER



NAME: **VAL STEVENS**

AGE: **74**

ROLE AT SAILABILITY: **Reception/ Pontoon/ Skipper**

BACKGROUND: I met Val in a coffee shop in Ringwood before her double dose of activities at the David Lloyd Club—dressed for the gym and looking amazingly fit. Hmmm—I am going to have to up my game!

Having met the late, great Mary White at a keep fit class Val was "persuaded" to join NF Sailability in April 2008 so is probably now the longest serving volunteer. As Mary had long holidays to Australia (to see her family), Val was recruited partly as cover on reception and to help with events. From thinking she would do a couple of hours on Friday afternoons, she is now there all day on Fridays and is part of the Events Team, so involved away from our "normal" activities and out of season.

NEW SKILLS: Having crewed on larger yachts (35ft+) she learnt to sail our 303's (3.03mts ie about 10ft) and pottered about when there was time or a break in sailor groups. But when a lady skipper was needed Rory asked Val to help and that was her start as a skipper. In between the reception and the boats is the pontoon, so Val also stopped on her way down to help out. So, as we can see, a genuine all-rounder! She says, though, that her days as a skipper are just about over as her knees and bad back make it difficult to scramble in and out of our boats.

Another skill honed to perfection is diplomacy—especially needed when dealing with the interaction between the sailors, their carers and our volunteers! Also sometimes just with our volunteers!

ANY DISASTERS?: With someone so obviously competent you would expect not! Oh, except that time when she was helping send a boat off the pontoon by pushing the boom along but forgot where she was on the pontoon and, still pushing the boom, stepped off at the end! Her life jacket exploded and she was left bobbing up and down before getting rescued. Much laughter all round—how cruel (chuckle). And the time when she was still learning to sail when she went round a buoy at speed and those on the pontoon could see the underneath of the boat, keel and rudder. Perhaps a little less sail? And a lot less enthusiasm!

ACHIEVEMENTS/ PROUD OF: Apart from sailing and exercise classes etc, Val also plays golf and was elected as Lady Captain of Crane Valley Golf Club in 2018. Each year, golf club captains raise money for their chosen charity and Val decided to raise money for us. She managed to raise a large amount but also persuaded Stewart Rennie (who was the Men's Captain that year) to elect NFS as his charity and between them they raised enough to buy a new 303—you will see it on the water and named "Crane ". A proud moment indeed when the boat was launched by Val and Stewart in May 2019.



Launch of "Crane"

Val also wants to express her pleasure that she recruited Stewart as a volunteer. A welcome addition to the reception team on Fridays.

WOULD MISS IF STOPPED VOLUNTEERING: As with most of us, Val would miss the people who volunteer with her and the Events Team members. But she would also miss the sailors—those who learn to sail and achieve the RYA awards, those who come for a sail to just enjoy the experience.

ANYTHING YOU WOULD CHANGE?: Val is a fairly organised person and some of the NFS organisation can be a bit chaotic. She feels that we would benefit from more direction on a daily basis. For instance, the 3Rings system is not used by everyone but even if it was, there does not seem to be any acknowledgment of potential shortages of volunteers in particular roles. Does anyone check for shortages? Who tries to sort out issues? Who is supposed to? Umm —I do have some sympathy for these points.

ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?: We definitely need more—and younger—volunteers. Whilst acknowledging the great job that Brent Coleman does at Volunteer Fairs etc, Val wonders whether we could be giving talks to, say, local sailing clubs and perhaps even to Spinnaker.



Val and Rory at the 2012 carnival. I have nothing to say!

Thank you, Val, for agreeing to be the "victim" for this edition of the Newsletter. It was extremely enjoyable talking to you and hearing your story of volunteering at NF Sailability. You said that you were more generally relaxed than when you started at Sailability and accept that things will never be perfect—although I get the feeling that you will do whatever you can to improve things!

EVENTS TEAM

SOCIAL EVENTS

The Events Team have asked whether the members want a social event this year. We have the Christmas lunch booked for Monday 7 December 2026 and we will host the TT Race Day on Thursday 9 July. But in past years we have held additional events such as the Volunteers Day when we had fun dinghy races and lunch—or when it was raining or too windy to sail, Malcolm has hosted a quiz. We have also had barn dances, Ceilidhs and skittle evenings but these have been poorly attended in recent years so the Events Team would like your views.

Firstly—do you want a social event at all this year?

Secondly—and assuming that you do—what would make you sign up and turn up? Some of the suggestions are:

* Volunteer fun races
* A skittles night
* A quiz
* Barn dance
* Race night with hobby horses moved by throwing a dice
* Talks

Or any other suggestions?

Please let a member of the Events Team have your views and suggestions if you would like another social event this year. The Events Team are: Val Stevens, Liz Holmes, Jane Knight, Tash Stephenson, Jacqui Baker.

REQUEST—OK A PLEA—FOR VOLUNTEERS TO THE EVENTS TEAM

Whilst on the subject of events, the Team would welcome (with open arms) anyone who is interested in joining them. The more people who are in the Team will help to spread any load. I have to say that they do seem to have fun meeting up to discuss what they are going to do. If last year's 25 Anniversary Lunch was anything to go by, they also have fun putting on the events. So all you sociable people out there (yes, that excludes me) please get in touch with the existing Team members.



Definitely having fun!

GOODBYE TO ANNE THIELE



Sadly, Anne has decided to retire from NFS. She has been a member for many years and has been a central member of the reception team on Fridays. She has also helped out with various events and was an initial member of the Events Team when that was more formally set up a few years ago.

The Events Team and all those volunteers who have worked with her on Fridays say she will be missed and only hope that the "retirement" will be more of a break than a permanent goodbye.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

Yet another successful event organised to perfection by the impressive "Events Team". OK, that's the grovelling and ladling on praise over—I need the Events Team to provide information on future events for the newsletter!

As usual, we had a huge raffle which raised £370 and an entertaining table quiz. I am not sure how my table didn't win the quiz as I am convinced we got all the right answers, but in the words of the late great Eric Morecombe—not necessarily in the right order!

It was good to see many of our sailors and especially great to see Richard Savill and Anne, and Rory Morrison with her daughter, Sheila. Plus previous volunteer Silvia with daughter Sally.

I am including some of the photos taken by Chris Wales and pinched from our website. If you came, there are some good memories. If you didn't come—you can see what a great time we had and book early for next year which will be on Monday 7 December 2026.



Events Team and what a team



Rory and daughter Sheila



Even if you are on the Events Team you still need to buy raffle tickets!



Richard with Julie Kitson



Who are these characters?



Sylvia and Sally—good to see them again

For more great photos by Chris Wales—see the NFS website Gallery.

Sailing Success Last Year

Congratulations to Daniel Newton who achieved his Silver Award In Autumn 2025



We are looking forward to more sailors achieving RYA Sailability Awards in the coming season.

Volunteer of the Year Award

Congratulations to Steve Kitson who was voted Volunteer of The Year 2025



As this is an award which is voted on by the members, it shows the respect felt for Steve for his efforts around the club in sailing, maintenance (and innovation) and for his racing endeavours. Well deserved, Steve.

You—the members—will be asked again towards the end of this season for your recommendations and votes for Volunteer of the Year 2026. Who are the unsung heroes around the group?

Representing New Forest Sailability

Volunteer Fairs—September 2025 and January 2026

Brent Coleman again represented NFS at the recent Volunteer Fairs. Thanks Brent for all you do to publicise us.

Other News

Testwood Lakes Sailability



An announcement was made on 14 November 2025 that Testwood Lakes Sailability had been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service. Testwood Sailability was set up by Eric Blyth who was also the driving force in getting NFS up and running. What a shame that Eric was not alive to see this but hopefully his widow, Sheila will be able to attend the formal presentation which takes place on 14 May. Testwood Lakes have extended an invitation to NF Sailability to attend the ceremony—please contact Malcolm if you are interested in going.

JAZZ TURNER

Jazz was featured on the BBC Radio 4 Saturday Live programme in March 2026. She has sailed at NF Sailability in her 303—notably taking her dog on board with her. But despite her life limiting genetic condition which has left her as a wheelchair user, she has continued sailing and recently sailed single handed around the UK and Ireland. She named her boat and the project "Fear" - named after one of her favourite quotes "FEAR has two meanings: you can Forget Everything And Run or Face Everything And Rise'.

Her long term project is to sail single handed around the world. Good luck to Jazz. You can see more of her story if you Google either Jazz or "project Fear".



RORY MCKINNA

Another sailor who has frequently joined us at NFS for the TT Race Series is Rory McKinna. Rory won the Hansa 303 Two-Person Worlds in Australia in 2025. Although he normally sails single handed, he decided to try the two person races and won in a highly contested series. Well done Rory.

