

CRAZY HORSE

Russ 'Crazy Horse' Tetlow on one of his favourite East Coast destinations...

hunstanton

Over the years I've become quite familiar with Hunstanton and its sailing idiosyncrasies. It sits at the top end of the southern opening of the mouth of the Wash and faces NW, so you get sideshore winds in either a SW or NE breeze. You can sail at low water with a bit of a trek – it's very shallow and thus extremely safe, although you do need to watch out for the buoy ropes that sit just below the water surface, and make a point of taking the time to test the depth for both your setting off point and the point at which you are going to gybe, especially if your fin is over 34cm long and again, especially on a spring tide! At spring high tide the waves are crashing against the sea wall, making launching and recovery only for the insane or very brave! (Personally I'd love to give it a go, but on someone else's kit perhaps, and with a decent back-up team...) At neap tides you can sail the full range of the tide.

On a mid-sized tide, after providing near-perfect

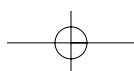
flat shallow water for a couple of hours for those of you at that tricky 'learning to gybe' stage, the tide starts its relentless rise and with it the water begins to provide some nice ramps. As the tide gets up toward the sea defences, and should you be over on the right just past the defences, you will find yourself in amongst some weird circular rock formations just beneath the surface. Check them out at low water if you get the chance, it may prepare you mentally for their weird effect on you when you're trying to get ashore. They really do have to be experienced to be believed, but best avoided if there's a choice.

Further to the right again, and a little way around the coast is Old Hunstanton. Between the two is a cliff, topped by a lighthouse. If the wind moves towards the WSW the cliff will leave a wind shadow over the mid to high water mark, and you're best packing up and heading off to Old Hunstanton. A brief study of the topography

before you start your day will help you decide which place is best to use. (More west again, best you head off to Brancaster, but more about that another day.) If the tide isn't too big and should you get yourself into trouble you can walk your way back along what is left of the beach and up the stairs that lead to the car park.

Occasionally, with a good swell coming in, Hunstanton can provide some exceptional big air sessions. It was here that I remember my first ever proper floaty jump, touchdown was just sooo soft and something I remember to this day (it's an elephant thing!) I believe that the best swell is usually alongside a NE wind.

Generally speaking though, it's a nice safe place for anybody interested in getting started on the road to sea sailing, no dump and no rip, with more than enough distractions ashore to keep everyone else happy too. You can sail from →





If you're coming in to Hunstanton from the west, head in towards the town and hook a left toward the beach, right at the new supermarket, along the beach road, into the town and left into the car-park. As you drive down the hill into the car-park there's a sailing club on your right which is well worth a visit if you are of the showering type, and they will undoubtedly offer you membership, the use of member facilities, bar, discounted parking and so on – but in all the years I have sailed Hunstanton I can't say I've ever used the place. Unless you count the time I attended the Hunstanton Windfest that used to be held there. Now that was one hell of a party, it had a proper feel-good vibe but very quickly outgrew itself, which was a real pity cos it rocked. The Sailing Club was its host and from there all drinks and toilets were accessed. Yep, once the taps were turned on, they just never stopped...

Hunstanton to the OldTown and back again if the tides are playing, but watch out for the mussel beds at the OldTown if the water's not so high. Hunstanton gets quite busy on a windy weekend, it's a very popular spot for windsurfers of a certain ability but watch out for those other blighters, the ones who pollute our shores, yep, the kitesurfers. They've even got their own shop there. I'm sure it'll close down soon though, it's only a passing fad, after all...

Hunstanton has plenty of facilities for both the water and non-water bound traveller, with toilets, cafés, chippies and shops aplenty. There's a tourist information centre, pubs, accommodation, a bandstand, Water World and even a fair. Further into the sunnier season they even have an amphibious tourist truck for trips in and out of the water, how blingin' is that? Not.

Car parking is £4 all year nowadays as the council have cottoned on to the fact that people are using the beach and promenade throughout the year (not too long ago it was free in winter). Plenty of room to rig, albeit on concrete, with the best place being in the lee of the stairs which lead to a seating / viewing area that is sheltered from the wind. In the old days we used to bring our own hosepipes and use the tap at the bottom of the steps to wash our gear down, but apparently that is no longer an issue for modern sails? However, the taps are still there.

Our most recent session there was at the end of March. The weather was sunny and the wind was plentiful, the kind of weather that – when you're out there working in it every day – tells you in no uncertain terms that it's time to pack up your tools, go home and load up your toys; so that's exactly what I did, I even managed to persuade Richard Jayes to act as co-conspirator. We went to Whitwell, Rutland Watersports to start with,

but the main gate was locked and there was a placard across the main gate telling us it was closed until February! And, er, this was late March. So we decided to drive down the no entry road to try and find out what was going on. It turned out that Rutland Watersports were just coming to the end of their 'Winter Fast' at Whitwell where they close the whole reservoir for two days in the week. As the biggest manmade reservoir in Europe, Rutland has been blessed with two sailing facilities, a Sailing club on the opposite bank for the yachting fraternity as well as a windsurfing centre at Whitwell. In the old days you used to be able to launch from the sailing club when Whitwell was closed. Whitwell however, started a one day a week closure thing about six years ago or more. It was no great shakes to start with as they would open to windsurfers if the wind was above a certain speed, closed or otherwise, but their hearts weren't entirely in it. Following a replacement of the entire hierarchy, the plan completely crumbled. The windsurfer who set up the centre was booted out and the corporate boys went in. Nowadays lowly windsurfers, even those that subscribe to an annual launch fee, have to find an alternative place to sail over these two days because the whole of Rutland Water is closed. There, I'm much happier I got that off my chest, I could go on but the last time I got involved with this subject, I started a petition, wrote letters of complaint etc, etc, etc... When I went over the heads of the guys who took over the centre I ended up getting a list of a greater number of complaints about my own behaviour than the list of complaints I had written in the first place. It's a funny old world.

Anyway, having come this far there was no way we were going back to work, so we opened up the map and headed off to the next nearest place

that was going to work in a south-westerly – Hunstanton. An hour and a half or so later and we were surveying the scene. The whitecaps were out *en masse*, it was 4m weather, but the forecast was for the wind to die down at any time. We rigged and were on the water in a flash, hurtling back and forth, as you do, popping fronts like they were going out of fashion, well some of us were and we were just having a whizz of a time. Easy sailing in very windy conditions, with a little swell to boot – nice, and a good excuse to try popping that fin out. The tide however, was coming in at a pace, and it was going to be a big one, so we decided to break out the camera to try and grab some snaps. It wasn't easy, the wind was not playing ball close in to the beach, so by the time you were ready to perform you were just too far out to sea to catch any decent action – ahhh, the pressure of getting a good shot. The picture session did not last long, the tide was up and the wind dying off so it was time to pack up and head off home, before we left though I thought it might be nice to reveal a couple of snaps of that other windsurfing star, the one that really knows how to put on a show ... the seal! Till next time...



Russ 'Crazy Horse' Tetlow is sponsored by Aloha Sailboards and Seasprite – RRD / EZZY. Pix courtesy of The Nugget