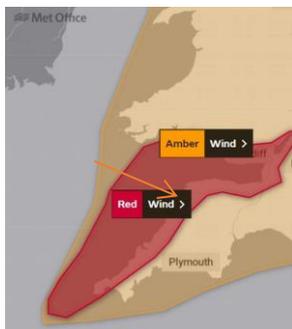


STORM EUNICE FITTING OUT WEEKEND 18-20 FEBRUARY 2022; FALCON HOTEL, BUDE

By Bob Walker

Imagine that you are the manager of the Falcon Hotel in Bude and a group booking of about 50 people had been cancelled in Feb 2021 due to COVID-19. A year later the same group has rescheduled the booking for the weekend 18-20 Feb 2022. COVID restrictions have been relaxed and the hotel is looking forward to a busy out of season weekend and then Storm Eunice comes ashore on the North Coast of Devon and Cornwall at the start of the weekend. This was significant for the hotel because even if the group wanted to travel on the Friday, they were being told not to as a red weather warning for wind had been issued urging everyone to stay at home unless their travel was essential.



Not to fear said the Westerlys. With charts to hand and meteorological images scrolling across their screens they did what comes naturally to those seasoned yachties; they bolted for cover and drove for safe refuge in the Falcon Hotel a day ahead of the storm. I doubt they would have known at that time that in 1820 the Falcon Hotel was built as a safe refuge for seafarers and over 200 years later the Westerlys would continue that practice. How I would be smiling if I had been the hotel manager on that day when the Westerlys came in early. 14 arrived a day early to enjoy the hospitality of the hotel staff and the round of Port served after dinner, courtesy of Rupert and Christine Brendon, owners.

My wife and I were not of the 14 who arrived in Bude ahead of Eunice. We had decided to delay our departure from Plymouth on Friday anticipating that the red warning would be downgraded at Midday. At 1300, the Met Office downgraded the red warning in the South West but Eunice would continue East whilst breaking wind speed records in its path. Wind speeds of 122 MPH were recorded off the Needles with London and the South East receiving their first ever Red Warning. This photo of the fallen tree in Bude was streaming on the news channels just before we set off. A clear indication of what we might expect on the journey to Bude.



Late Friday afternoon saw the remaining stragglers making it into the Falcon Hotel, 44 in all had arrived.

Hard hats were the recommended auxiliary dress code for anyone venturing out Friday to experience Eunice and unfortunately, the Cornish Rum Distillery visit had to be cancelled. Two taxis had been booked to transport the 12 rum lovers to the distillery; the taxi company phoned to say their taxis were not going anywhere that day.

Friday evening and a buffet dinner provided the ideal opportunity to meet friends, old and new. It was particularly pleasing to see several new members to WOA and the South West Group and especially a family of 4. Overall that evening there was a sense of achievement, 2 years of COVID-19 and Storm Eunice to get to this point, arguably the premier social event in the South West Group calendar. After dinner, all were treated to the annual quiz, this year being set by Janet and Paul Millard, the last events quiz winners. Bob Walker and his team were the winners of the Eddystone Trophy 2022.

The Fitting Out weekend was organised and co-ordinated by Chris and Polly Barton. Those of us who have experienced Chris and Polly events in the past will know that they are meticulously planned with attention to detail and as the Fitting Out weekend unfolded it was quickly obvious that it was yet another example from the Barton Book of Meticulous Planning. Despite the wind and rain during Saturday, the Westerlys mustered in their foul weather gear with Chris and Polly leading a team each, one of which had elected to take a short walk and the other a long walk.



It was Chris with his smaller team of 12 who arrived first at the Weir Café having taken the shorter route. Soaking wet they certainly were, but this was nothing compared to Polly's team of 24 who arrived 40 minutes later looking like they had completed the Royal Marine Assault Course more than a long walk.

After a warm through and a good lunch, the intrepid walkers once more stepped out into the wind and rain to complete their walk back to the hotel. Once back at the hotel, several of Polly's team were seen to veer off, attracted by a standpipe and fresh running water to wash away the remaining mud which the rain had failed to do. Two stalwarts set off for a training swim in the sea water pool!

Smart casual attire was requested for the evening dinner which started with a complimentary glass of Prosecco provided by the hotel. The food was plentiful and astoundingly good. So it was that as the evening drew towards a close, Chris and Polly once again provided an outstanding after dinner speaker in Rupert Kirkwood. Also known as the Lone Kayaker, Rupert is a qualified vet who explores the waterways from the sea particularly along the SW Coast. Rupert has kayaked 1,156 miles from Poole to Minehead having paddled up every creek and waterway as far as he could get at high tide. Around the world, Rupert has paddled over 28,000 miles in total but for the evening's speech he fittingly concentrated it on the South West of England.

Rupert's speech was a presentation of his work along the SW Coast and all its waterways and creeks. It was presented with stunning images of the wildlife on the coast and in some instances many miles out to sea in the Channel and SW Approaches. Each photograph had its own story and for the next hour he captivated all of us with these visualised accounts. His speaker fee is



generously donated to the Cornwall Wild Life Trust.

Here are just a few of his photographs and his web site can be found by following this ink:

<https://thelonekayaker.wordpress.com/about-the-author/>



And here is the captivated audience:



Saturday night was closed out with a huge applause for Rupert and then also to Chris & Polly for organising the weekend. Come Sunday morning however, Chris and Polly were not finished with us yet. For those that didn't need to head for home straight away, Polly gave an interesting, informative guided tour to the group around the ancient town of Stratton. At the church they were met by 2 members of the church who provided something of the history of St Andrews Church. From here the group gathered for a Sunday roast lunch at the Preston Gate Inn which was the final organised event for the Fitting Out weekend.

On behalf of all the members of the South West Group who attended the Fitting Out, thank you Chris and Polly for organising and managing a wonderful weekend for us all. COVID we knew was going to be a challenge but Storm Eunice was a late surprise and potentially disruptive but you pulled it off and we are all so grateful to you both, thank you.