

MOVING ON FORESHORE MUD AND SOME NOTES ON DRYING MOORINGS

The attractions of a mooring

Laying a mooring is one way of making boat ownership more affordable and a mooring has its own attractions. While rowing out to the boat in a dinghy one becomes more attuned to weather and tide than when stepping aboard from a pontoon. Doing so in the early morning still, alone with the wildlife, is a time for appreciation of one's privileges. Whilst a drying mooring has restricted access, in many locations it is only of practical significance when returning. At Bo'ness, on the Upper Forth I go out to the boat on the last of the flood to take the ebb down river. Having to time one's homecoming to reach the mooring and get ashore is the constraint.

A drying mooring enables one to occupy a sheltered location in a bay on soft mud, where the boat will not get a pounding as it settles. Deep soft anaerobic mud helps preserve the ground chain. When the boat has taken the ground there is less wear of mooring components and it affords an opportunity to work aboard without motion. If there is a need to go up the mast this is the time to do so. Ballasted down by the head one can check and clear the propeller. The boat is also a hide from which to watch eider, gulls, heron, shelduck and waders feeding close-up on the tideline. Mud is a very rich source of invertebrates.

Naturally there is a down side to a drying mooring but it is not insurmountable. Mud tends to coat antifouling, permitting the growth of barnacles particularly on those surfaces that sit on the mud. Keeping the deck clean is more difficult, not having a marina hosepipe, the mooring strop bringing mud aboard. Mud is also very abrasive. I had to have a S/S steel boot made for my GRP rudder, the lower edges of which were wearing with slicing down through the mud. There can be a lot of this as on a neap tide the boat takes longer to settle. Keels of glassed-in ballast need the same protection. My keels are cast iron and lose the paint along their lower edges, necessitating patch priming each season.

When I looked for advice on laying moorings I found little coverage in modern books and turned to *Cruising and Ocean Racing in the Lonsdale library (1930s)*⁽²⁾ which has a comprehensive treatment.

Practicalities of laying moorings

In Scotland there are plenty of sources of chain and components. For ground chain I bought condemned big ships anchor chain from Midland Ship Repairers, Grangemouth. Advertisements in "Fishing News" lead one to suppliers of second-hand soft mooring chain. It is also used by the fish farming industry for which Gael Force, Inverness is a major supplier. These sources enable one to avoid high tensile chain much used in industry, being brittle and disliking salt water.

Chandlers supplying the fishing industry are a great source of lighter chain, buoys, thimbles, shackles and swivels. The Fisherman's Mutual branches in Eyemouth and Peterhead are highly recommended. Their plastic handled Swedish fids are much stronger than the wooden handled yachting variety, permitting hitting with a mallet, and their marlin spikes are a generous size.

Mooring sinkers can be made from heavy steel, pipe blanks for instance or made of concrete with heavy steel in it. Visits to local scrap yards usually come up with something suitable that will lie flat and not damage the boat. Concrete in water only weighs a third of what it does on dry land hence the need for adding weight.

I spliced a strop in heavy cable laid nylon but found this tended to unlay, despite using swivels. Others in the locality have experienced the same phenomenon. My boat always moves round the mooring clockwise with each tide on account of a local eddy. I solved the problem by making up a strop which comes up onto the boat, takes a turn round the cleat and goes back down to the chain. A short seizing is put on the strop at the cleat so there is no chance of it coming off by accident. For good measure I use a swivel on the strop and the rising chain.

A raft is used to lay and recover mooring sinkers. Used plastic drums attached to a wooden or steel frame with stainless steel banding makes a relatively long lasting structure. A mooring sinker can be raised by tidal lift but has to be partially dug out to help break the suction of the mud.

Every component in the mooring needs to be thoroughly up to the job. The pins of cheap imported shackles need to be peened over with a hammer or welded. Their pins are a poor fit and tend to come loose. I use tested shackles screwed up tight and moused with the thickest black nylon cable ties that will go through the eye of the pin. The little spools of thin monel wire one sees in yacht chandlers are not for mousing large mooring shackles.

Moving on the mud

Laying and inspecting a drying mooring is facilitated by the ability to move on mud. It enables one to dig in a mooring sinker to increase its holding power and bury anything sticking up that might damage the boat. If the mooring is lost, raking for it on the mud with a hook is more likely to be successful than dragging for it from a boat. One's tracks mark the ground searched and one can rake deeper in the mud than a grappler can reach. My hook is a length of S/S rod attached to the end of a thick wooden broom handle with worm drive hose clips (Jubilee clips).

I bring in the rising chain for the winter, leaving a length of heavy nylon and buoy on the ground chain. This helps preserve the chain, saves six months wear of shackles, swivels and strop thimbles and enables servicing in more favourable working conditions ashore. The changeover is more easily done from the transom of a dinghy than with a mud horse, going out to the mooring as soon as the tide reaches our slipway and preferably on a neap tide. One has to take care that when freeboard is reduced by the weight of the ground chain hauled up to reach the rising chain shackle, the dinghy is not swamped by the wash of a big ship.

Expertise in moving on mud comes from two main groups, wildfowlers and fishermen. The wildfowler wants to get within range of a flight line and pick up quarry which often means traversing mud. The stake net fisherman needs to move on mud to set nets and retrieve his catch. Sea anglers dig bait on the mud, particularly rag worm (*Nereis diversicolor*). The stake net fisherman uses a mudhorse, a kind of sledge. Wildfowlers and bait diggers use mudboards (mud pattens) that distribute their weight like snow shoes.

Competence on the mud finds other applications such as archaeological and biological survey. Foreshore ship remains and shellfish beds become accessible and other recoveries possible.

Mudboards

Most advice on mud boards originates from Hawker on Shooting⁽¹⁾. The illustrious Col. Hawker describes the Hampshire board 12 inches square, the Poole, Dorset board 16 inches square and methods of tying them on. The [Langstone and District Wildfowlers' Association](#) web page gives pictures and much helpful advice on using them.

Personally I find Col. Hawker's boards too large, the suction making it difficult to lift ones feet. Mine are 35x18cms (13x7ins), have some beading to fit the heel of the boot, two transverse rows of beading underneath for grip and lines to tie them on. Interestingly their design also originates from the Langstone area. I acquired it in the early 1970s from an ex-Royal Marine, the late Richard Leavesley who kept a boat in Langstone harbour and dug bait there.

Most old wildfowling books provide some variation in design but essentially they all serve the same purpose, lowering ground pressure. These books have much to offer the coastwise yachtsman as wildfowling was once much pursued from yachts and gun punts.

Mudhorses

I always use mudboards in conjunction with a mudhorse. Mine is a version of that used by Brendan Sellick⁽³⁾ the last of the stake net fishermen on Bridgwater Bay in the mouth of the Severn estuary. There are many photographs on the Internet. His is 8ft long and 18ins wide and can carry 2-3cwt. Mine is shorter. Raised sides stiffen the structure and keep mud off its platform which is used for carrying tools and chain. Leaning on the mudhorse frame takes weight off ones feet, lessening sinking and reducing suction on the mudboards. Mr Sellick goes a mile out on the mud and doesn't use mud boards, just lace up plimsolls. Going only a few hundred yards, I prefer mudboards on dry feet with thick socks and wellies.

Off Bo'ness the dumping of mobile dredging spoil has added a top layer of very soft mud. Twenty years ago I could walk on sandy mud without mudboards at my mooring. Now there is 18 inches of mobile mud over it, necessitating the use of a shuttering frame to dig down to the sinker for inspection of the chain. The frame, made of scaffolding board timber, is taken out on the mud horse along with a shovel and bucket to bale it out. I have used the mud horse to take out replacement ground chain, a 22ft length of stud link big ship's anchor chain weighing around 50kgs and bring in the old one. Returning is a particular effort when laden as the gradient, though slight, is against you.

Clothing

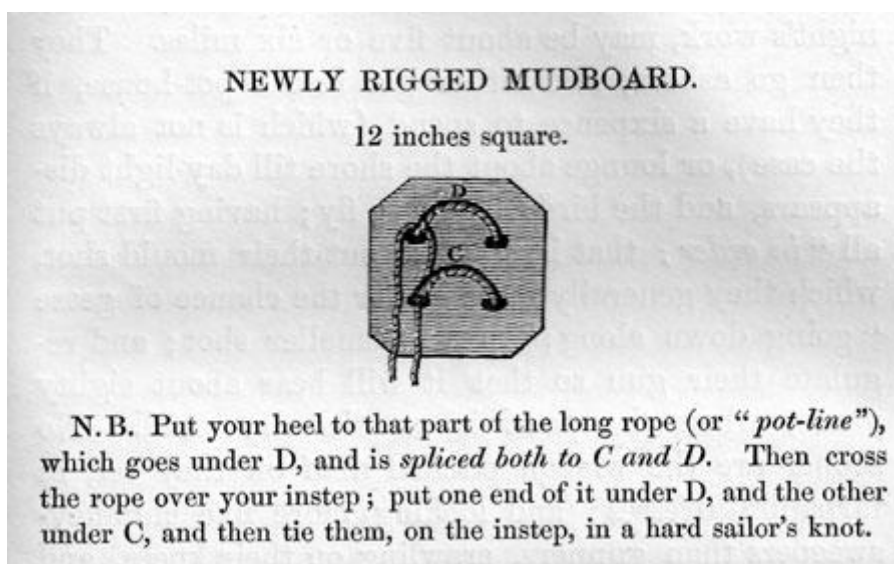
As an outer layer I wear a green plastic chemical suit which goes over Wellington boots enabling one to wash oneself down when off the mud. Inevitably one gets muddy but the suit keeps the worst off. Mud is very punishing on the hands so rubber gloves are strongly recommended, long ones or North type wrist length.

Rescue from mud and a cautionary note

Other people go on the mud, notably the Fire Brigade and Coast Guard for rescue purposes but they use inflatable rescue walkways, necessary if somebody has got deeply stuck. They can also use a lance delivering high pressure water to overcome suction on the casualty. The equipment is very expensive and labour intensive, masses of it to be cleaned after use. A mudhorse and mudboards are minimal cost and have the advantage of speed of deployment, potentially of the essence on a rising tide if only for initial assistance.

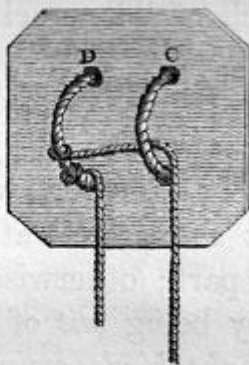
Having been moving on mud for many years I hope to avoid having to call on rescue services. It appears that those who take a tumble or get stuck are either without mudboards or are reliant on mudboards alone, not using a mudhorse, and inadvertently venture onto an area of very soft mud. A mudboard coming off could be the start of an incident without a mudhorse to take some of one's weight while it is re-tied. I have lost a mudboard and being unable to retrieve it was glad of the mudhorse. A spare mudboard is a useful contingency, three being made almost as quickly as two.

Wildfowling⁽⁴⁾ in the Lonsdale library offers cautionary advice and a different design of mudboard made from strips of wood to lessen suction, untried by the writer. In mooring areas water filled hollows left by boat hulls are the main trap to be avoided but are usually fairly evident. Like sailing, going on the mud needs preparation and treating with respect. It is physically very tiring and remote from assistance. One has to be self sufficient.

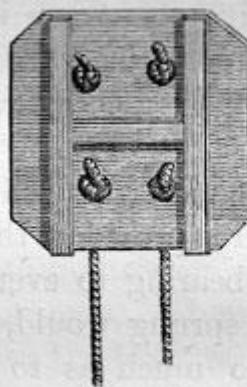


POOLE MUD-BOARDS.

Sixteen inches square.



Upper side.



Under side.

Put your foot into C, with your heel hard against D ; place one of the small ropes on each side the foot, and under C ; then over it, and under D. Having done this, draw the ropes together, as tight as the foot can bear them, and tie them over your instep. These boards are, of necessity, larger, and fitted up with stronger rope than the others, because the Poole ground is so very soft.

But the Hampshire boards with our improvements of double splicing, and having strong pot-line, to "lash" over, are now by far the best, and the quickest to "ship and unship."





References

1. Instructions to Young Sportsmen in all that relates to guns and shooting, Lt. Col. P. Hawker, London, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 9th Edition, 1844. (Pages 383 and 397 deal with mudboards and tying them on.)
2. Cruising and Ocean Racing, E.G. Martin, John Irving and others, London, Seeley Service & Co. Ltd., undated; Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1933, 592pp.
3. Last of the mudhorse fishing line, The Times, Saturday 4 October 1997, Page 9.
4. Wildfowling, many authors, London, Seeley Service & Co. Ltd., undated, c.1950.

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Yacht *Blue Spindrift*

8 January 2016