

“This is a learning curve.”

After a quick trip home to visit family, I was soon back on the road to start part two of the Shipshape programme: an incredible bespoke course at the International Boatbuilding Training College, Lowestoft (IBTC).

We crammed a massive amount into our first month at IBTC. In the first week alone, we took a tour of the college and grounds to see examples of different boats, student work and the equipment we'll use. We had an in-depth look into timber technology; hard and soft woods, its structure and properties, issues that affect it such as wet and dry rot, bugs and worms (Gribblies as they're affectionately referred to), grain patterns and their pros and cons in boat building — who knew there was so much to know about wood!? We looked at the structures that make up a boat from the keel up to the deck and everything in between and had a go at 'roving' — a method of riveting clinker boat planks together.



Later, we visited one of our partner hosts, Lowestoft smack *Excelsior*, based just around the corner from the college. The team there were part-way through winter maintenance but were kind enough to give us a tour and speak to us about the boat and her history.



One of the sessions I enjoyed the most was Knots and Splicing with instructor Rob. The session was very informative and had a fun 'Knit and natter group' vibe, complete with tea and biscuits! I learned several new knots and whipping techniques and had a go at splicing traditional and modern styles of ropes and wire. On the second day we made decorative knots such as Monkey Fists and Turks Head knots out of paracord.

During the latter part of the week we were in the The Cabin workshop learning how to create bent timbers, by laminating or steaming around a mold (which was somewhat of a 'learning curve').



We started by working out the angle of the curve and made a plywood template which was transferred onto a solid timber big enough to hold the work and accept several clamps. This was shaped on the bandsaw and mounted onto a board to form a mold. We started with the lamination: layering thin strips of wood and glue and clamping it

around the mold. Once dry, the lamination held its shape.

For the Steaming practical, we placed lengths of oak in a steam box for around 40 minutes and used the same mold to create the curve. This was clamped and left to set for the rest of the day. It was surprising how strong the oak was and amazing how malleable wood can be once it's heated and the lignum has plasticised. A really fascinating and enjoyable few days.

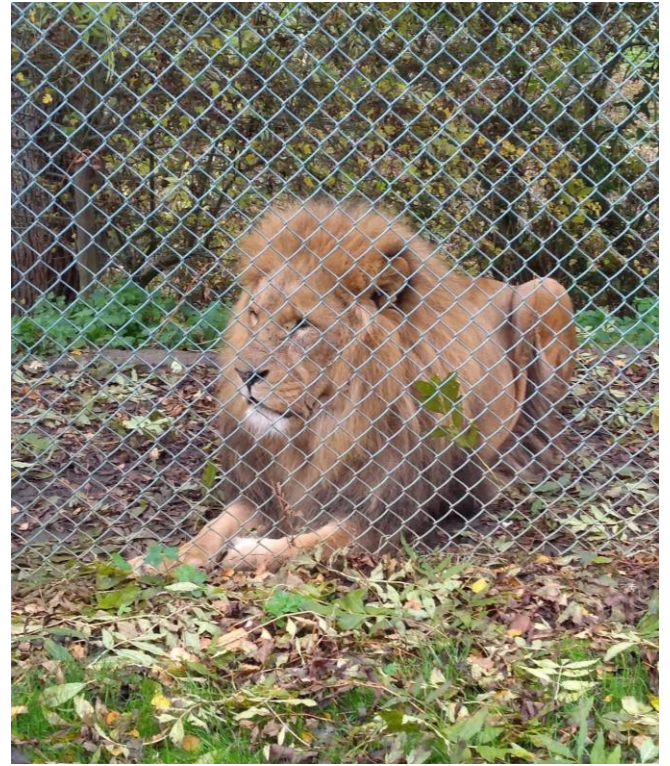
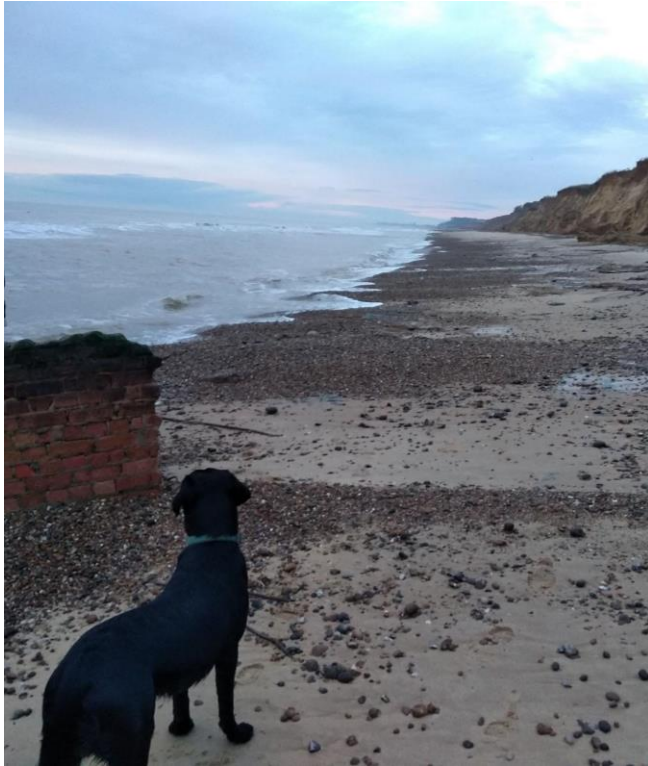


Towards the end of the month, we started our 3-week stint in the Joinery Shop which was both very challenging and rewarding in equal parts. Everything here was new to me, from using a hand plane and a marking gauge to sharpening chisels on a stone wheel. But with practise, perseverance and many, many plasters from First Aid, my fellow trainees and I completed several woodworking projects; including a bench hook and a beech mallet each, which have both come in very handy.



It hasn't all been hard work however, and I've very much enjoyed exploring the local area. I've taken early morning walks on Covehithe beach, had a trip to Africa Alive! Zoo with my partner Jack, and trainee Hannah, and I even went to watch a very moving play about a Lowestoft fishing village, called "Pearls from the Grit" — which was excellent!

I'm really loving my time in Lowestoft!



Pupdate - Shipshape dogs, November.



Panda, IBTC

'Smashing Lad'.

Gentle giant.

Enjoying his retirement.

Slow but steady.

Very good boy.



Eddie & Merlin, IBTC

Father and son duo.

Prone to zoomies.

Comedy double act.

Will bark for walk.

Very good boys.



Winston, House-share mascot

Winnie, Winsters, Winchester, Win-Stefani, Winnebago.

Awkward teenage phase.

Will chew your shoe.

Ball is life.

Very good boy.