



*It's looking brighter up ahead!*



***"Its looking Brighter up ahead!"***

In 2001, I retired. For the first time we had *time*.  
*Ariadne* took us to the West Coast of Scotland

The Crew were  
***Graham & Dairne Rabbitts***  
Joined by  
***Iain and Clare Rabbitts***  
*for the Classic Malts rally*

Acknowledgement is gratefully given to the following sources

Loan of charts and pilot books  
David and Mary Bailey (*Caramor*)  
David Colquhoun (*Santana*)  
Roy Gannaway (*Phaedias*)

Pilot Books  
Clyde Cruising Club  
Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson (West Coast of Scotland Pilots)  
Scottish Islands (Hamish Hamilton Smith)  
Irish Cruising Club Pilot  
Cruising Association Handbook

Charts  
Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson  
Raychart/ C-Map  
Admiralty Folio Series and other charts

Photographs

Dairne and Myself  
Sam Brooke  
David Colquhoun



[Warning: Small scale passage charts show soundings in feet: large scale port plans show soundings in metres]

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## *Outbound*

### **Preparation**

The retirement cruise was a long time in the planning. We had struggled with the old sails for at least a season more than was desirable so that we could set out with a new suit of Hood sails. We already had a Hood heavy weather jib that could live on the foredeck in its own bag, to which we added a trisail from Sanders and a cruising chute from Ullmans.

The trisail was based on advice from Mike Thoyts who has taken a Rustler round the world, mostly single handed. Sanders had made his sail, so we just asked for a copy. Mike has some novel ways of using a trisail that we are interested in trying out. He also added boom gallows in New Zealand, so we got the details from him, slightly adapted the idea, and it was made and fitted at Shamrock Quay. It is already a big hit as it provides a very safe handhold as well as keeping the boom steady.

The mast had been unstepped (for the first time) by Neil Cox at Solent rigging, allowing a thorough check and the addition a separate track for the trysail. The short backstay was also modified to incorporate a backstay tensioner.

Advice from David Bailey, who has cruised *Caramor*, another Rustler 36, to Shetland, led to us fitting a stakwrap sail cover made by Lucas – much to the annoyance of Stephen Boyd of Hood who clearly does not like interference with the flow of his sails. But for lazy sailors, a stakwrap is a boon. Also, it is so easy to put the sail cover on that it is likely to give the sails longer life.



Cruising chute adding at least a knot

We have not had a light weather sail for this boat, and decided a cruising chute was as much as we could manage. Ullmans, who have looked after our sails and done repairs for us for years were competitive, and got the order. The snuffer from *Fay-A*<sup>1</sup> was adapted to fit. Early trials were encouraging. When we emailed Clare and Iain to tell them about it, Clare replied that she was “looking forward to playing with the *Cursing*

Chute”. The name has, of course, stuck.

Pilot books from the Clyde Cruising Club and Imray were added to the shelf – the latter being cross referenced to the Imray charts. We also borrowed charts from David Colquhoun and Roy Gannaway, both Marchwood members who had cruised the Scottish West Coast. These were supplemented with others from David Bailey’s extensive chart library.

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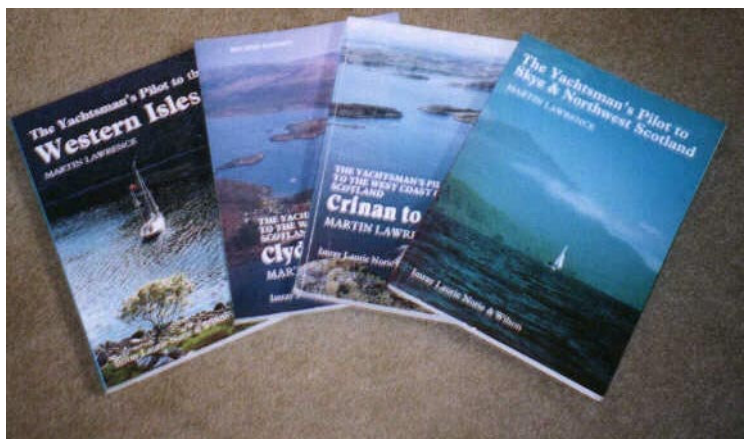
<sup>1</sup> *Fay-A* was our previous boat, a 30ft Scarborough Sloop



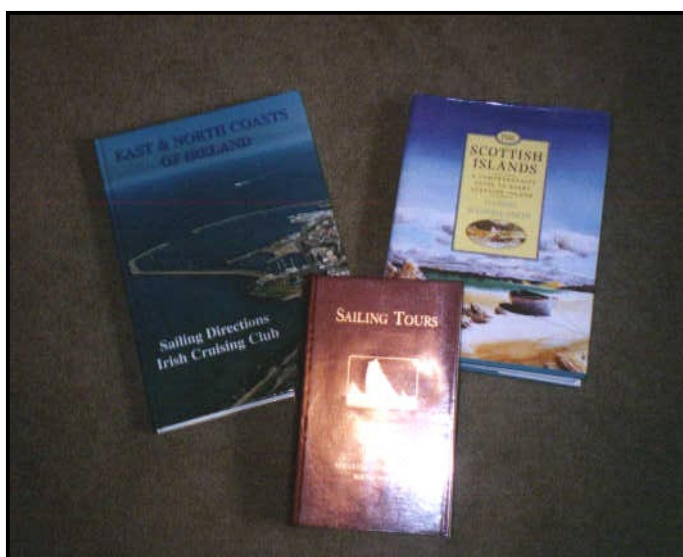
We carried an extensive set of pilot books on board.



The Clyde Cruising Club pilot books give very clear information with explicit diagrams of the approaches to most anchorages. The photographs are separated from the text, but are occasionally helpful.



Martin Lawrence's Imray Pilot books offer a different view, and sometimes include his personal opinions. These are interesting, and illuminating. Photographs embedded in the text are very helpful.



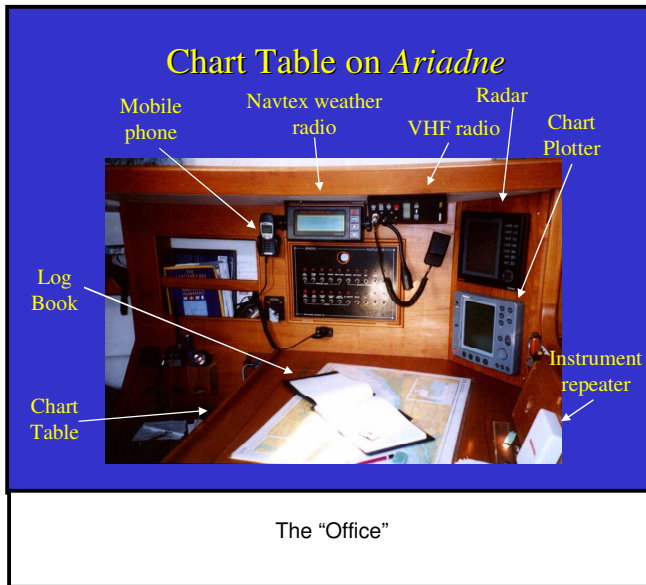
The Irish Cruising Club Pilot was essential for the visit to Strangford Lough (although the only diagram of the whole Lough appears in the Cruising Association Handbook).

Hamish Hamilton Smith's book on Scottish Islands provided immense pleasure. It covers the geology, history and features of interest for over 500 Scottish islands. He visited all the islands in a Moody 346 and his personal pilotage observations were extremely interesting, if occasionally idiosyncratic.

Cowper's Sailing Tours was a late addition to the shelf. His comments on cruising in Scotland have been used in this Log.



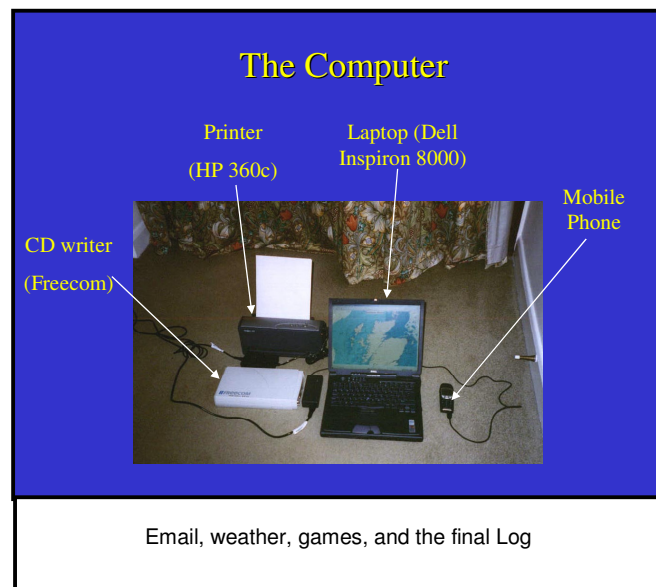
Navigationally, the plotter (an original ST model) was replaced with a modern Raychart plotter. Coupled with the Raytheon chart software on the laptop, this should enable us to produce a more attractive and accurate log.<sup>2</sup> The PC software also includes a facility to download weather maps from the web. As these do not need to include the chart itself, it is a quicker download than some of the other weather maps, an important consideration when using a mobile phone. Navtex weather radio was also added.



The ABP computer guru talked me into a more expensive PC than I had intended. It is a Dell Inspiron 8000 with Windows Professional 2000 – a lovely machine. However, all endeavours to work out how it could be mounted at the chart table have failed. Probably just as well as it is now kept in a secure dry locker while at sea, and only used in harbour. There is also a HP 360c colour printer. A new 12v socket has been added close to the chart table for charging all this kit – a 300watt inverter is also available.

I had waited to see if GPRS would be available and tried to find out whether Bluetooth was a reality or a myth. In the end, the mobile phone chosen was a standard GSM Nokia 6210 with a cable link to the computer. The clever stuff will have to wait for future years.

The combination of PC and mobile phone allows us to keep in touch with family and friends through email, as well as allowing access to weather and other internet data.



Odds and ends purchased at the Southampton Boat show included a foldaway luggage trolley (for ferrying fuel and water), an EPIRB, a handheld GPS to act as backup, and a cheap night vision instrument. The outboard was also replaced with an environmentally friendly (!) Honda 4-stroke.

<sup>2</sup> The chart software on board was Raychart version 2. This did not allow soundings to be shown in metres, so all the small scale passage charts in this log have soundings in feet. The large scale port plans included in this log were prepared later using version 3 which does allow soundings to be shown in metres. It was not practical to redraw the small scale charts.





Probably the best value for money of the winter additions

The final piece of equipment to be put on board was a magnificent drum sextant, a gift presented by the Directors of ABP on my retirement.



Sextant presented by the Directors of ABP – a real precision instrument

So we were ready to set off with a fully equipped boat. However, I have been watching David Colqhoun's experiments with a Darglow prop with interest.....!

It was not until I visited the Falmouth bookshop on the way back that I found a copy of Frank Cowper's "Sailing Tours: Part V: The Clyde to the Thames round north" for £2.95. This bargain is a delight and contains many dry comments about the West Coast of Scotland, and I have reproduced some of them where they relate to this narrative. But to illustrate his style, here are some comments from his Introduction:

*"Looking back on the experiences of a cruise of two seasons in Scottish waters, I think what strikes me most is the provoking nature of the country, on the West Coast especially.*

*The beauty of the scenery is unquestionable. So exquisitely lovely are the lochs and Sounds of the mainland and the Western Isles that, as one thinks of them, there comes a devouring longing to rush off to them again, to be once more sailing among those glorious waters, where mountain glen and towering peak rise grandly abrupt or mysteriously wild from the mirroring depths below. Where the warm sun glows on a wondrous wall of marvellous hues, brilliant in gold and purple and dazzling green, all mellowed and flecked with opal light as the grey mist floats up from some darkling corrie, and melts in the smile of sea and sky as they blend together in radiant blue beneath the midday sun.*

*Such colouring I have never see elsewhere – so tender, rich and warm. Let others talk of autumn tints in Canada's maple groves, or of the glowing tones of Rio's far famed harbour. For me the hues of wild loch Goil or Appin's tangled shore are beautiful enough, and to see them at their best there is nothing like a yacht. How many times have I sailed an oar's length from beetling crags which soared aloft to dizzy heights, and whose every crevice and jutting crag was glowing with splendid colour or shrouded in mysterious gloom, where the influence of man seemed as far remote as Himalayan peak or Colorado gorge."*





Yet only a couple of paragraphs later he says:

*"For cruising such as I intended, and pursued under the same conditions which have accompanied my other voyages, Scotch weather is most trying"*

And a little later:

*"But to enjoy the sights [of the Highlands] something must be suffered. Beauty like this is rarely shown except to those who are ready to dare much and endure more"*

In the gossip sections of his book, Cowper relates many of the local legends and history – in many ways filling in for the mainland the wonderful account of the history of the Islands in Hamish Hamilton Smith's book. Early on he points out that:

*"....there is one prevailing characteristic about Scotch legends as about Scotch weather – they are almost without exception gruesome"*

Sailing Tours was written in 1895 when Cowper, often single handed, sailed a 48ft converted Dover pilot cutter (with 6'6" draft, and no engine) round the West Coast. His words, I can assure you, ring true today, despite all our modern gear and navigational aids.



## Departure

As in previous years, Dairne had been adding tinned food and long term stores for some weeks. Unlike previous years, however, the house had to be shut up for three months. Every detail had to be attended to, as well as the last minute loading of clothes and food. Last minute purchases included water and diesel carriers, and a new light for the lifebuoy (as the danbuoy light had failed with no replacements easily available). These details used up all the 1<sup>st</sup> June, and on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June, I took a full load to the boat, thinking that stowage looked as though it was going to be easily soluble.



*Ariadne ready to go*

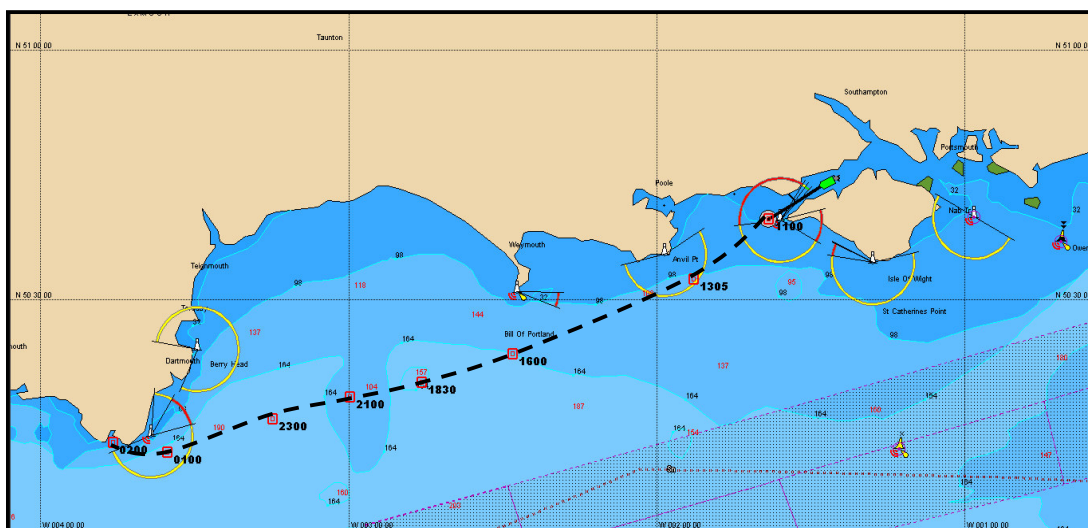
Mistake! When I went back to pick up Dairne, there was another carload. I left Dairne on board to solve the problem – which she did – while, with the help of Betty (Dairne's mother), I parked the Renault at the docks to be collected by the hire car firm. It had served well, but we decided that if we were going to be away sailing a lot, there was no point in having two cars in the garage eating their heads off.



Gentle reach down Needles Channel

Exhausted, we turned in prepared for an early start on the Sunday morning. What had been forgotten?

## Sunday 3rd June: Marchwood to Salcombe



Away at 0715, a sunny morning. We motorsailed to Calshot to allow time for breakfast and final stowage. Before 0900, the engine was off and we were reaching down the West Solent in NW4. It looked promising. By 1100 the Bridge buoy off the Needles was abeam, but by 1215 the wind had dropped, so the engine went on again.



At 1240, the seabreeze arrived with a thump – the noise of the portable radio crashing, terminally, to the cabin floor. From then onwards, it was motoring with the new wind staying stubbornly on the bow all the way to Salcombe where we arrived at 0230.

The nightsight was excellent for seeing mooring buoys lurking in the fairway.

It took three attempts to get the anchor to hold, but it was a still night so there was no serious concern as we went below for the rest of the night.

### Monday 4th June: Salcombe to Falmouth

Salcombe used to have reputation where yachts were pounced on for money. On this occasion, not only had we been met by a launch at 0230 to make sure we were OK and happy with our anchor, but they left us to get some sleep. I had to call them on VHF when we woke up, and as we were leaving after only a few

hours, they insisted we were 27 ft to give us about a 30% discount. Nice gesture, much appreciated.



Autopilot out of Salcombe

There were various forecasts about, including SE going SW 3-4 good becoming moderate with showers. Others mentioned SE,SW,NW and even NE – not to mention seabreezes! So we set off at 0900 in eager anticipation of what the lottery would produce. At first, nothing. Under power again, passing south of the Eddystone, until at 1240 we could dump the engine and enjoyed a pleasant reach/fetch in light SSW breeze.



Visitor's buoy at Portscatho

Because of the loss of the radio we decided to go into Falmouth, but as we got closer, we thought the wind was going to go NW, so we went into the small anchorage off Portscatho to see our good friend Hilda who lives there. Ashore, we enjoyed a drink at her house with a beautiful view of Gerrans Bay and Dodman, then a pub meal before carrying the dinghy down to a very low tide and

returning aboard.

### Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> June: Falmouth

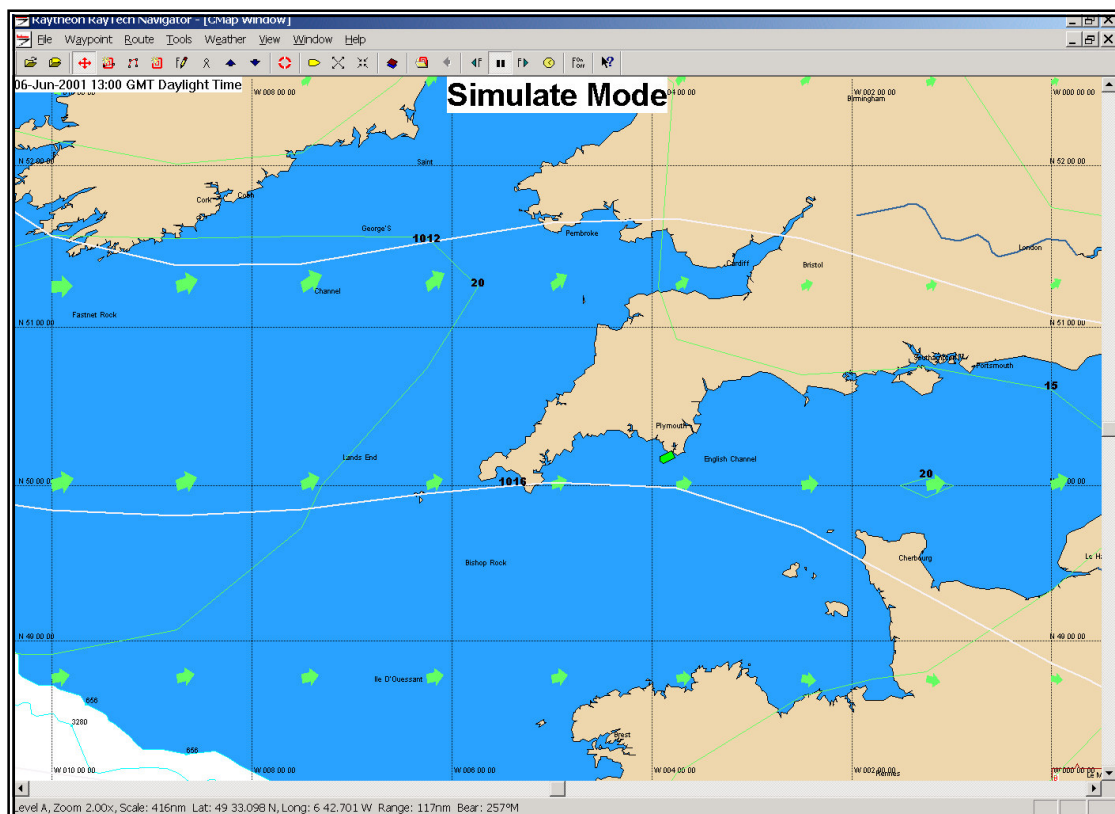
At 0500 a swell had started to work into the bay, so we motored round to Falmouth in a surprisingly lumpy sea. It seems a SE breeze was on the cards for the morning. This would have been ideal for rounding the Lizard, but we were set on replacing the radio, getting some varnish, and perhaps seeing Chris Owen. We could also top up with water and diesel, having motored for nearly 20 hours already.





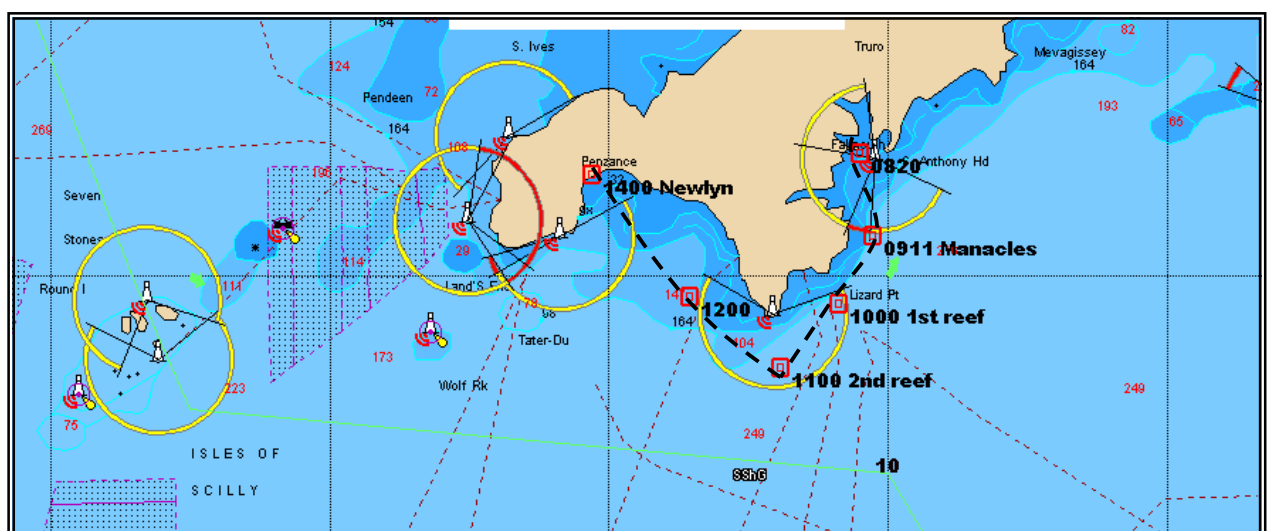
It turned out to be a productive day, even though the Falmouth fuel barge was out of commission. We were only charged for a short stay at the Town Marina while I went shopping, and Dairne filled up with water. Then up the river to Falmouth Marina at Penryn to get diesel and see Chris Owen at Rustler Yachts who was commissioning another Rustler 36. He offered us his mooring off Flushing for the night.

Frankly, after the rush of leaving and two long days flogging westwards, we were in need of a restful evening. It also gave me a chance to get on the internet and experiment with getting weather data. This proved an interesting experiment and indicated that the Raychart maps were reasonably good, and very cost effective on mobile phone time. The things we tried are described in [appendix 1](#). The chart we produced is shown below. This is one frame from a three day animation and shows what we experienced at 1300 hrs off the Lizard, although all the weather forecasts



underestimated the wind strengths

At 0800 we were under way, motoring past Pendennis Castle before setting full sail, trimming the Monitor wind vane, then letting the boat romp down past the Manacles







buoy. The wind was gradually backing into the SW, and we were soon close hauled. At 1000 a reef went in to both main and genoa, but we were still romping to windward in a gentle swell.

Approaching the Lizard the wind freed a little and strengthened. We have always found this a lumpy area so we took a wide handrail round the Lizard. At 1100 we tacked and put a second reef in the main., The sea was now very lumpy and gusts to 25 kts were not uncommon. We could almost lay Lands End, and it was tempting to go on. Dairne's common sense coupled with strong wind warnings for the afternoon allowed us to free off a little and enjoy a storming reach into Newlyn which we reached at 1400. As we approached, we experienced one gust of 30kts, and a yacht that arrived an hour later had experienced 35kts. Good call, Dairne!

We then spent a day resting in Newlyn waiting for the N 5/6 wind to abate. We were inside a fishing vessel owned by a young lad who told us that you had to be keen or mad to buy a boat like his. He had had to pay £20,000 for his licence to fish, and had had gearbox trouble. He reckoned that a good living could be had playing the fruit machines on the dole. But that was not for him. He wanted to do something and was getting on with it. Good luck to him!



Newlyn

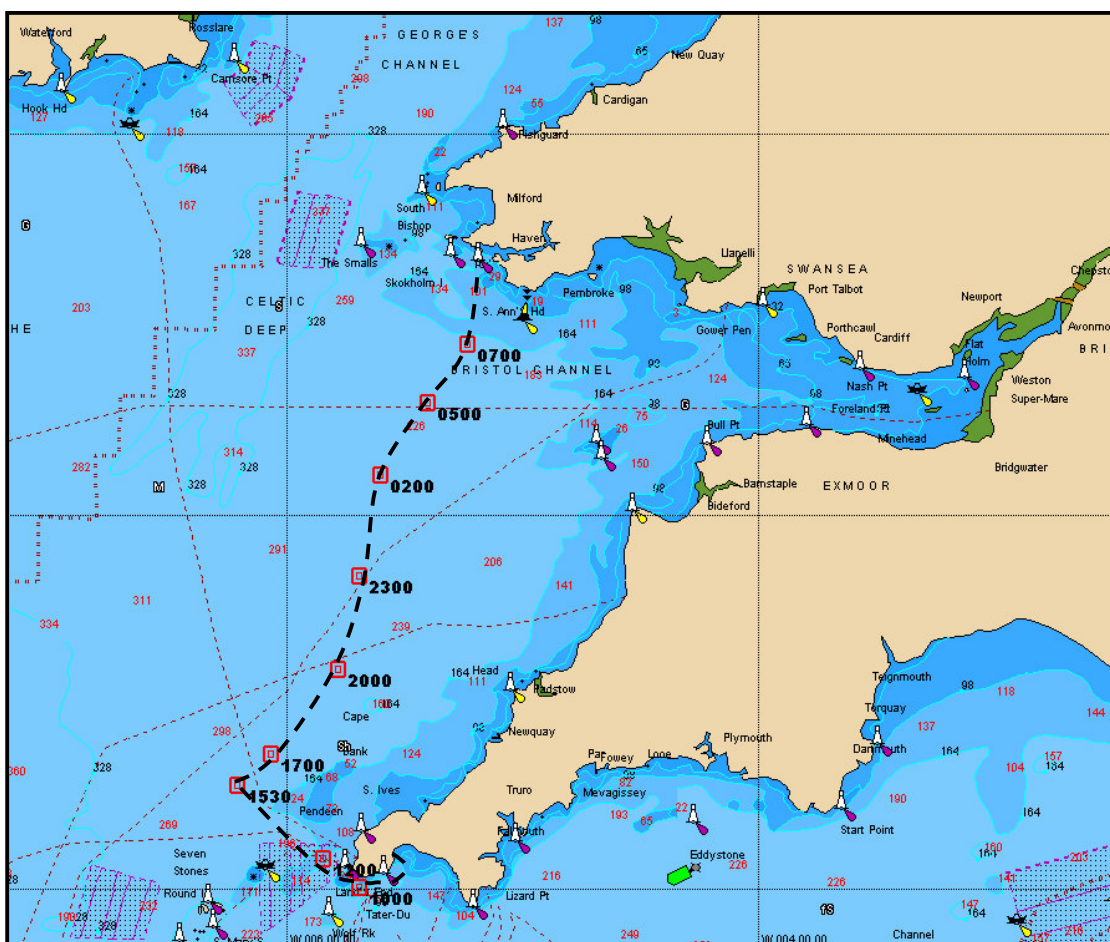
Inside us was a French yacht from Cherbourg that moved out in the early evening to take on water prior to an early departure to Ireland. And on the extreme outside there was a mini-transat yacht – not much more than a big dinghy.

Newlyn remains a working fishing port, but it is clear that they are beginning to think that fishing may not be enough in future and there are plans to make the place more yacht friendly. A pity in some ways, because it will attract all kinds. Now it is only the keen and able who bother to go there.



## Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> June –Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June: Newlyn to Milford Haven

We had a diversion option to the Scillies, but were keen to get on north if we could. A departure at 0900, with the help of the harbourmaster, allowed us to motor sail on a broad reach (with full main) all the way to the Runnel stone, where we unfurled the jib at 1045 and hardened up.



It was good sailing until about 1540 when we decided that to get the miles done, we would have to motorsail as the wind – yet again – had shifted to be right on the nose from Milford Haven!

The wind remained at NNE 4/5 all the way until just before midnight when it had gone sufficiently into the NW to allow us to sail.

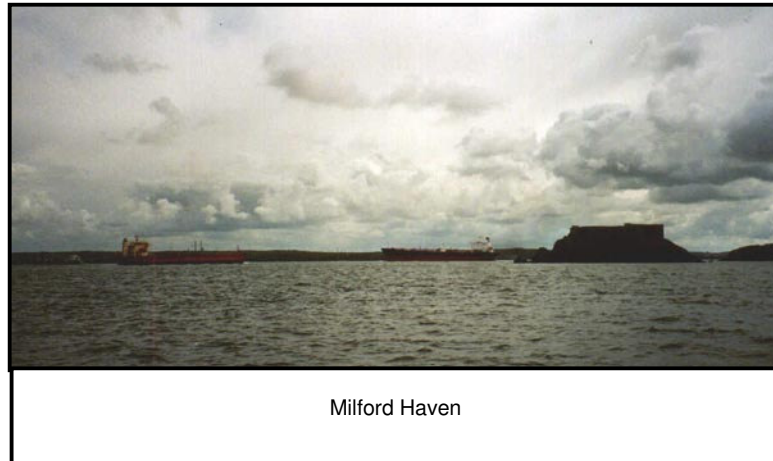
I was on watch at the time. Here we were halfway across the Bristol Channel when the depth suddenly went down to 20m then five minutes later to 7m, then it disappeared altogether. Was the instrument failing? The answer appeared in the form of 2 dolphins swimming alongside for a few minutes. Obviously, they had swum under the echo sounder, which had been unable to re-establish a depth reading because it was too deep! As a result the low depth readings sat on the display for half an hour or more. I have never heard of such a thing before., but it became a common experience throughout this cruise.

The wind gradually became close hauled as the change of tide shifted the apparent wind. Dairne took over at 0530 and logged seeing lots of puffins (but later thought



they were probably guillemots). By 0550 the wind had died and the engine was on again. By breakfast time we were still close hauled. Dairne had prepared lots of sandwiches for the trip, and we still had a good stock. We grilled some bacon and stuffed it into rolls filled with cream cheese with prawns. Interesting!

After breakfast, it was all visual pilotage into Milford where we made fast at Neyland marina at 1230 to be met by our friends Nan and Bill, who live there.



Milford Haven

There followed three days of socialising, enjoying their lovely home and hot baths! Bill had also made for me a half block model of the Rustler. It was an impressive piece of work, made in a lovely pine.



A brisk sail to Dale with Nan helming

sail. It was reach both ways to Dale where we picked up a buoy for lunch, then stormed back towards Neyland. As we were fairly early we went two or three miles above the road bridge. It is a soft and attractive valley with small anchorages and boatyards here and there.

The winds were generally brisk and northerly, so we were quite happy to wait out the weather. It did give us one beautiful sunny day when we were able to take Nan and Bill for a



Bill, who made the half block model





At one of the villages, Bill showed us a racing gig called *Intrepid* that had been built recently. He had been helping the local nautical institute to build another identical twin. The next day, he took me there to see the work. It is an impressive carvel hull



Bill's half-block of the Rustler now hangs in my study

built on laminated frames. There were all kinds of projects being undertaken by the students, including a minitransat yacht.

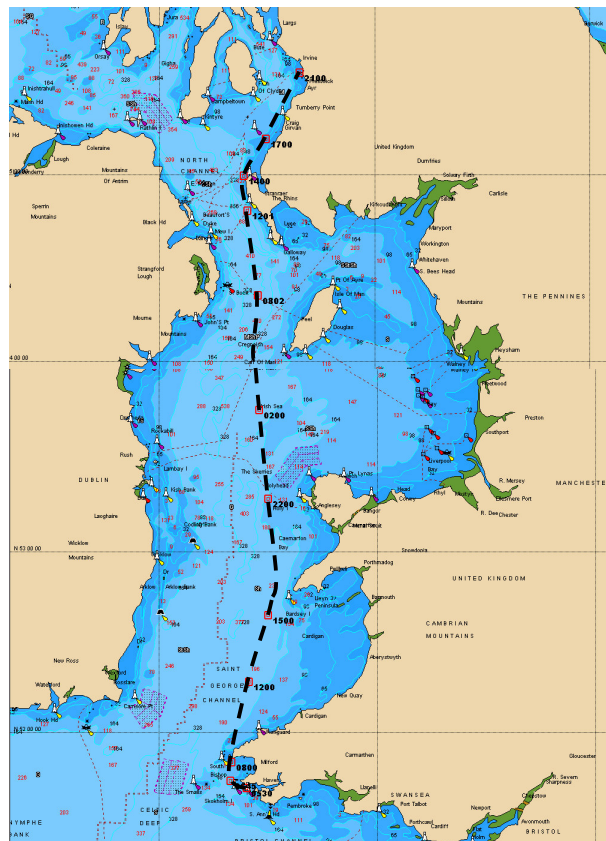
Altogether, it was a relaxing interlude with good friends. Dairne admired their garden, which was spectacularly maintained and spent an hour or more walking round it. Nan said that most visitors just admired it from the living room. It was probably the best thing Dairne could have done, but she enjoyed it anyway!

## Monday 11<sup>th</sup> June –Wed 13<sup>th</sup> June: Milford Haven to Troon

At 1915 on the 11<sup>th</sup> June, we made our farewells, and motored down the harbour and picked up a mooring at Dale ready for an early start on the Tuesday. We reckoned on a couple of days settled weather, and we were determined to push on a bit.

That evening, I found that the computer was not connecting properly to the internet. My first thought that it was either the mobile phone or the modem cable, While not critical to the sailing, it was useful to be able to get weather maps, and we were relying on it as a means of communication with the family and with respect to pensions. But we could not waste the weather window, so we decided to go on, probably to Holyhead.

At 0500 we got under way under power in flat water and virtually no wind. We motored out of Milford Haven, between Skomer and





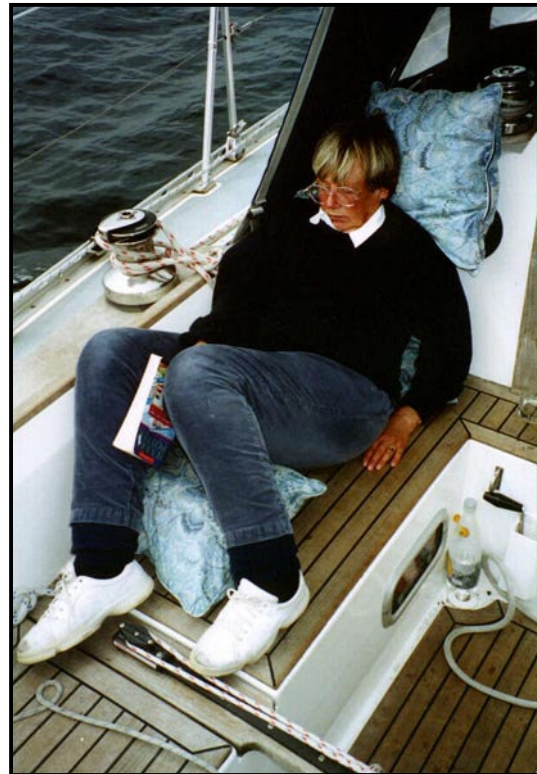


Skokholm, passing to the west of Skomer. We then realised there were tide advantages from going through Ramsey Sound, so we shaped course for what was quite an interesting passage.

With Strumble light on the beam, course was shaped across Cardigan Bay towards Holyhead.

A couple of phone calls unearthed the fact that Carphone Warehouse did not have a shop in Holyhead, although there was one at Conway. Other options were Barrow (which would put us downwind for the forecast weather, so was not favourite) or Dublin (which we could not visit because of the foot and mouth restrictions that could have resulted in all our food stocks being confiscated!). The final choice was therefore to wait until we got to Scotland, but there are no Carphone Warehouse shops North of Glasgow. Tricky!

As the afternoon wore on, the weather remained settled with the sea flat. We



...and topping up her own batteries!

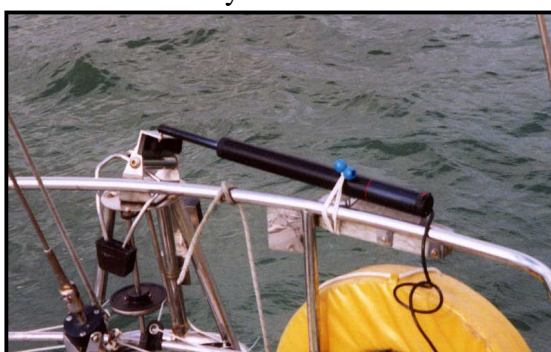


Dairne is good at keeping the inner man supplied...

were just plodding along under power. The forecast for the next 24 hours was also encouraging. In the end we agreed we would press on to Troon on the Clyde. We reckoned we had just enough fuel to motor all the way.

Which is exactly what we did!

Dairne took the first night watch from 2130, passing the shipping between Holyhead, Liverpool and Dublin. By 0300, there was still some light in the sky to the North when I took over. The Calf of Man light was just visible. By 0400, a grey dawn showed the outline of the mountains on the Isle of Man, but it was a long time before we saw anything of the Mull of Galloway. During this period, the continuous slight rolling had put a lot of strain on the block supporting the autopilot and worked the bolts loose to the point where it was losing efficiency



Autopilot rigged on Monitor to reduce strain



and likely to pull itself to bits. At the second attempt, the electric autopilot was switched to operate on the Monitor. This greatly reduces the strain on everything, but adds a further link in the control mechanism resulting in some unavoidable hunting.

One very interesting aspect of going up the Irish Sea is the way that, if you get the timing right, you can carry the flood northward to Holyhead, cross a large 'dead patch, and the take the next ebb northwards from the Isle of Man. It is possible to have favourable tide most of the way! We did quite well in this respect.

Voyage from <u>MILFORD HAVEN - DALE</u> to <u>TROON</u>		Date <u>13.06.00</u>			
DAY	TIME	COG	SOG	WPT#	WPTD
0000	53° 29.98'N 05° 01.15'W Several groups of lights but nothing on radar	265.4	004	7.0	001 67.3
0100	53° 37.71'N 05° 01.97'W Fishing boat passed at 1/2 mile	262.1	004	7.0	001 67.3
0105	Boat went round in circle - had to get it up	262.1	001	7.5	001 69.4
0206	53° 45.12'N 05° 02.37'W	262.9	359	6.9	001 52.3
0300	53° 51.18'N 05° 03.03'W Both Chalky & Gull of Man lights visible	263.2	358	6.2	001 48.3
0400	53° 57.29'N 05° 03.45'W Mountains on 100 visible - grey dawn	263.8	359	6.3	001 40.1
0500	54° 03.43'N 05° 03.96'W One ferry, one fishing boat in sight.	264.6	003	6.3	001 34.0
0540	F/C Var 2/3 → NE 3/4(S) in north.				
0610	Tried wave + autohelm. Failed. (Block working loose)	265.2	348	5.9	001 27.1
0630	2nd attempt - failed. Very smooth!				
0700	Small container ship passing! Getting busy!	265.1	353	6.3	001 21.9
0800	54° 21.91'N 05° 05.36'W Not much about	266.9	000	6.4	001 15.3
0900	54° 28.59'N 05° 05.40'W passed a fishing boat to St. Andrew's Inlet	267.8	000	6.8	001 8.4
1000	54° 35.85'N 05° 06.51'W Some waste seen	267.3	352	6.8	001 7.4
1024	54° 37.58'N 05° 06.70'W Change to next Waypoint 08	265.8	348	6.7	348 26.4
1105	54° 42.15'N 05° 08.84'W	268.0	345	6.2	348 20.8
1200	54° 48.94'N 05° 11.27'W Wpt changed to next corner (Corsewall Pt)	267.0	007	5.5	000 11.6
1300	54° 52.49'N 05° 11.68'W Sea glassy - grey anticyclonic gloom	266.9	006	4.9	000 8.1
1410	Beacon off Craig Laggan abeam (nearly) strange object!	267.7	005	4.4	000 2.8

Deck Log page

After the Liverpool-Dublin shipping, the absence of marine activity was quite noticeable. There was nothing in sight for long periods, not even a fishing boat. It got to the point that sighting any vessel warranted a log entry!

By 1400, we were abeam of the Craiglaggan Beacon off Loch Ryan, and shortly afterwards, Ailsa Craig came into view, a magnificent crag, and a personal goal. Twenty years earlier, I had promised that I would visit the area in my own boat.

At last some breeze arrived and we were able to ease the boom and gain an extra knot until we could have sailed, but we kept the engine on with just the main up, rounding into Troon to make fast at 2110.

We had covered 232 miles under engine, and the performance of the Yanmar and the electric autopilot had been exemplary. The use of the Monitor to reduce strain on the mountings justified having put the extra mounting block on the pushpit.

We had last fuelled in Falmouth, and still had about 5 gallons (25 litres) in the tank.

So far as we were concerned, we had now reached our cruising area, even though our original plan had been to go up outside the Mull of Kintyre. Now we had an



opportunity to regroup, and use the Crinan canal on the way north. First, though, the internet problems had to be solved.





## *Troon to Ardfern*

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup>- Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June – Running Repairs: Troon**

The forecast was pretty dire for the next few days, so Troon marina was a good, safe base to work from. Also, my ex ABP colleagues were on hand – and were to prove immensely helpful.

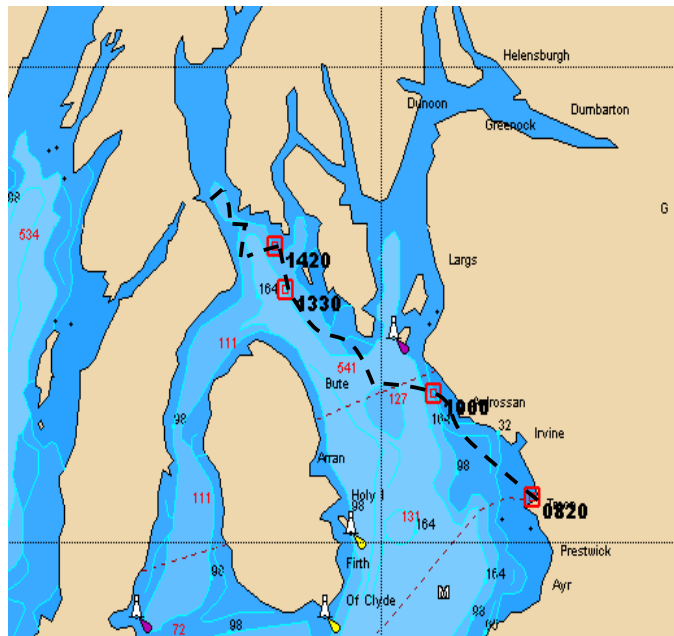
I caught the train to Glasgow armed with the computer, mobile phone and all the cables. Carphone Warehouse had a shop in Argyle Street next to Glasgow Central. They were very helpful, trying a range of combinations. At one stage they arranged for a PC expert to pop in too. Things seemed to be better, but still not quite right. They refused any form of ex gratia payment, but I did send an email to the company thanking them for their unstinting help.

By 1400 I was back on board, and we had a visit from Doug Morrison, the manager at ABP Ayr and Troon. Always a jolly figure, Douglas also presented us with two cut crystal glasses. Apparently he had a stock of about 60 pairs, which had been engraved with the wrong date for an opening ceremony! We were made to feel really welcome.

We took full advantage of the marina facilities, catching up on washing, showering and so on. The marina chandlery did not have a Scottish courtesy flag, was out of stock of batteries for the clock, and only had one ball fender when I wanted a pair! Apart from that, it was a great success.

Next morning, things had got worse with computer again. I arranged for Stewart Cresswell from ABP to pick me up and take me to the ABP office in Ayr where nearly 2 hours on the phone to Dell eventually solved the problem by reloading the com ports. I also discovered that BT had changed all the phone numbers, which explained why I had difficulty in getting Outlook email to function. Once put right, all was well again. At long last we had a robust computer, and we could again get weather maps, and the email would work. Not essential to sailing, but an important part of how we wanted to live.

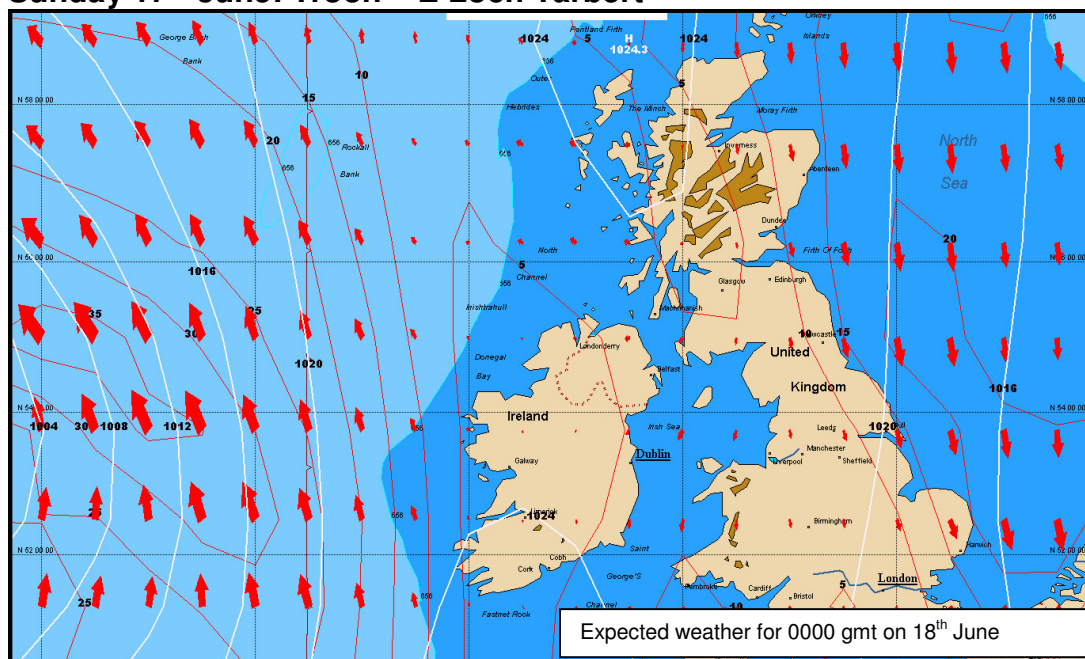
We sat out another day of bad weather, but there looked to be an opportunity on the 17th to get up to Crinan before a vigorous SW depression moved in from the Atlantic. The Crinan canal seemed like a good place to hide from the next bout of strong winds.



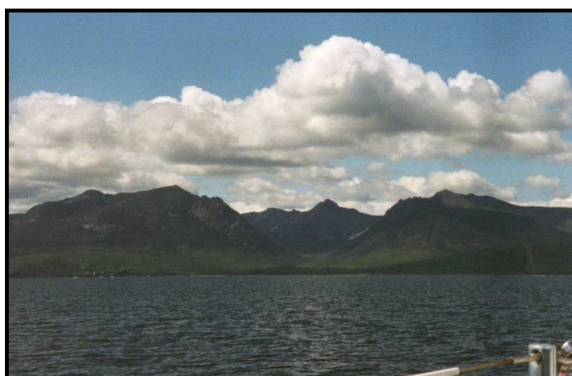




## Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June: Troon – E Loch Tarbert



Away from the pontoons at 0820, we motored clear of the harbour and made sail in NNW2 wind allowing us to beat gently along the shore towards Ardrrossan. The wind gradually freed, but by 1050 it had died away so the Monitor could no longer handle the boat. A new wind appeared 30 minutes later WSW1. We were no longer in a hurry so stood across the Firth with the wind shifting all over the place, eventually settling down to NW3 – bang on the nose again! There followed a good beat in sunshine up Loch Fyne, passing Arran



Arran

with its impressive mountains, Finally we came to the beautiful natural harbour of East Loch Tarbert at 1630. The track for the day showed all kinds of wiggles, but we had had some gentle sailing in lovely surroundings and got where we wanted to be.



Relaxing sailing!



East Loch Tarbet

That evening, we read the instructions for Crinan.<sup>3</sup> Like all pilot books, they tend to put the fear of god into the reader. We decided, however, that we would benefit from a couple of ball fenders, so decided to wait until the chandlers opened before departing the next morning. We also arranged to have snatch block available on the toe rails to get a decent lead to the winches.

### Monday 18<sup>th</sup> June: E Loch Tarbert to Bellanoch (Crinan Canal)



East Loch Tarbert

The chandlery opened promptly at 0900, run by a little old lady who had to go upstairs to find a couple of ball fenders, then showed me into the garage where there was an electric pump to inflate them. It was almost like Auntie Wainwright's shop in "Last of the Summer Wine". By 0930, we were on our way.

<sup>3</sup> "The Crinan Canal is 9 miles long. There are fifteen locks. Eight of 8ft rise, and seven of 9ft. .... The dues are not heavy considering the number of locks. .... This is the route usually taken by tourists to the Western Highlands, but the passengers have to change steamers embarking on a small one to take them through the canal, and spending usually two hours and a quarter over the nine miles. One would think a tramway would be more useful. .... Canal dues are from 6d to 1s6d a ton registered, but yachts are charged special rates. I believe I was asked 15s for my vessel rated at 19 tons. However, I had no intention of going through" – Frank Cowper, Sailing Tours vol V





It was a gentle dead run, done in two broad reaches to Ardrishaig at the end of the Crinan Canal. We had called them by phone and asked them to arrange a helper. As we approached, they called back to say this had been done, and when we arrived we were introduced to a wiry Scot called – yes – Donald McTavish.



Motoring through Crinan Canal



*Ariadne* in the sea lock at Ardrishaig



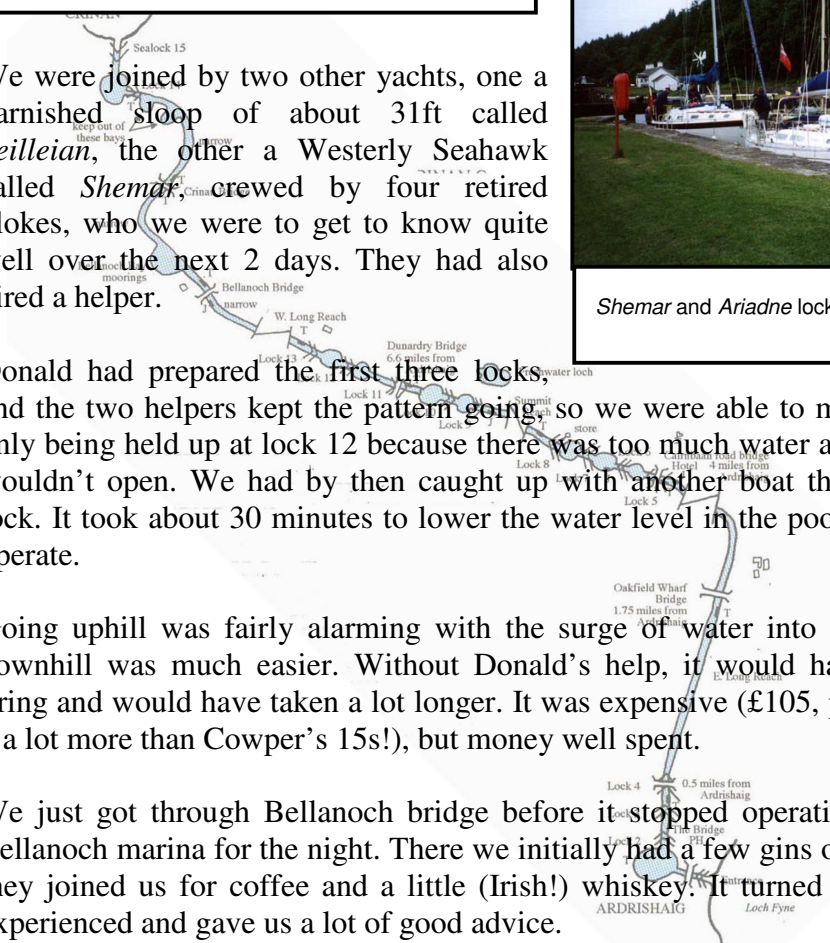
*Shemar* and *Ariadne* lock through the Crinan

We were joined by two other yachts, one a varnished sloop of about 31ft called *Seilleian*, the other a Westerly Seahawk called *Shemar*, crewed by four retired blokes, who we were to get to know quite well over the next 2 days. They had also hired a helper.

Donald had prepared the first three locks, and the two helpers kept the pattern going so we were able to make good progress, only being held up at lock 12 because there was too much water and the bottom gates wouldn't open. We had by then caught up with another boat that was stuck in the lock. It took about 30 minutes to lower the water level in the pool so the lock would operate.

Going uphill was fairly alarming with the surge of water into the lock, but going downhill was much easier. Without Donald's help, it would have been extremely tiring and would have taken a lot longer. It was expensive (£105, plus £50 for Donald – a lot more than Cowper's 15s!), but money well spent.

We just got through Bellanoch bridge before it stopped operating, and pulled into Bellanoch marina for the night. There we initially had a few gins on *Shemar*, and later they joined us for coffee and a little (Irish!) whiskey. It turned out they were very experienced and gave us a lot of good advice.







It had been a tiring, but fascinating day.



Looking across Loch Crinan to the delights in store

## Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> June: Bellanonch Bay to Ardfern

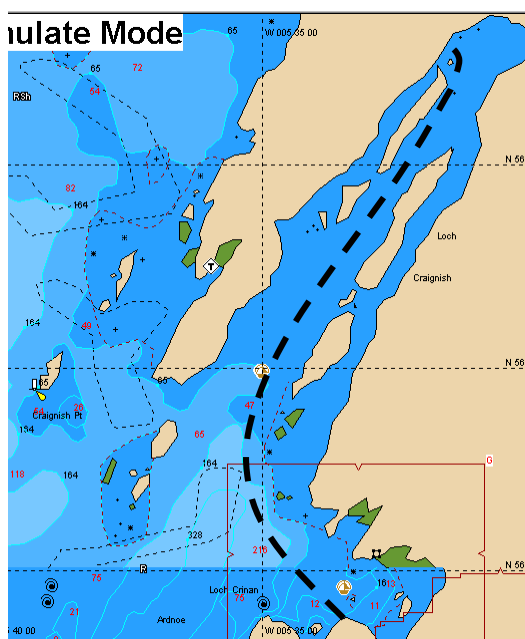


The pool above the sea loch at Crinan

The forecast was grim – SW 5-7, sea rough or very rough. We were resigned to staying put, but the *Shemar* crew had walked down to Crinan and decided that the real wind was only F3-4 and the sea was flat. They decided to push on to Ardfern and we decided to join them. One bridge, past the *Vital Spark* rusting on the canal bank, and two locks more took us into the open sea at Crinan, surely one of yachting's gems! Today it was fairly grey.

Fenders and warps were stowed, the ball fenders hanging on the pushpit, and then the genoa was unfurled to give us a gentle run in F2-3 up Loch Craginish. Only toward the end did the wind start to freshen as the rain fell with increasing determination. By 1500 we were alongside and quickly snugged down while it teemed and (eventually) blew for the rest of the afternoon, with the rain closing visibility to not a lot.

After the exertions of the previous day, we were glad of a rest.





### Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June: Ardfern



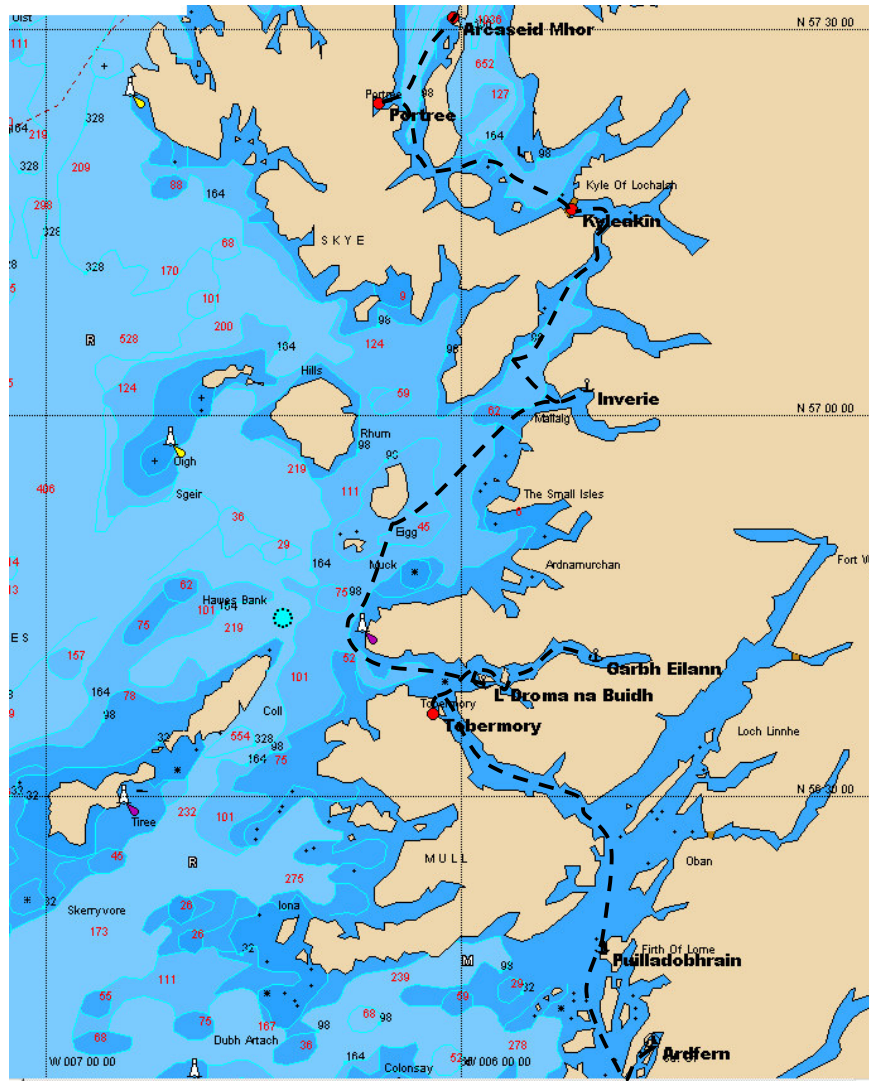
Grey day at Ardfern

It was still blowing, and the forecast was not good, but the prospect of a ridge in a day or so. We decided to stay put. The intrepid crew of *Shemar* set off to Dunstaffnage (N of Oban), all dolled up in oilskins, lifejackets and harnesses. They were looking forward to a fast but rough reach from Dorus Mor to Oban. With a big crew, they should not have had too many problems, but the morning produced several gusty showers.

We walked up to the pub for a bowl of soup and sandwiches by a roaring log fire, and called at the local shop for stores on the way back to the boat. Later Pat and Stuart Mosscroft, the new owners of *Cayambe*, another Rustler 36, came aboard for tea and wine.



## North from Ardfert



## Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> June: Ardfert To Puilladobhrain



Approaching Dorus mor

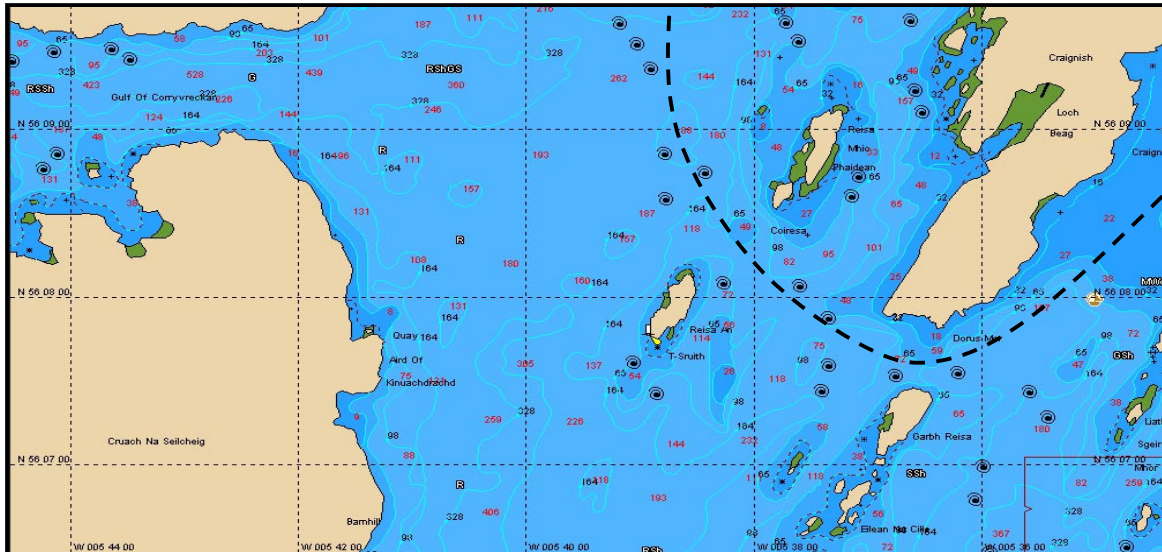
Ardinamir, then go through Cuan Sound the next day.

At last we had an improving forecast, but the wind was still said to be NW 3/4 - right on the nose for the Sound of Luing. So we reckoned we would go inside the islands and stop over at



Corryvreckan





Ariadne's track through Dorus Mor

We were away at 1000, motoring through the moorings to check that there were only three other Rustlers in Ardfern, *Celtic Spirit*, *Cayambe*, and *Blue Doublet*. At 1015, the engine was silenced, and the genoa deployed. It was a broad reach down to Dorus Mor. Then we hardened up to beat in flat water keeping an eye on the safe transits. It looked as though we could lay the course through the Sound of Luing, so we decided to go that way. At times, the wind brought down by Scarba gusted to 21kts, but it was always manageable. Terrific views through Corryvreckan – which looked tempting, but with NW 4/5 forecast, it was possible it would be very uncomfortable outside, so we stuck to our revised plan.



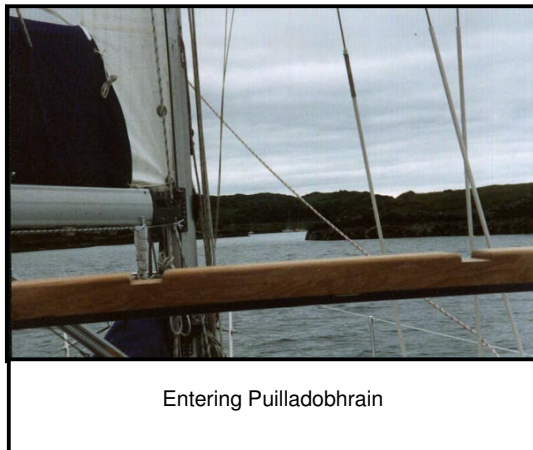
Swirls of tide passing Fladda

We had already discovered one of the big problems with cruising in Scotland – the range of choice. By going up the Sound of Luing, we were going to miss out on several nice anchorages and Cuan Sound. But choices have to be made. It would take a lifetime to explore all the nooks and crannies.

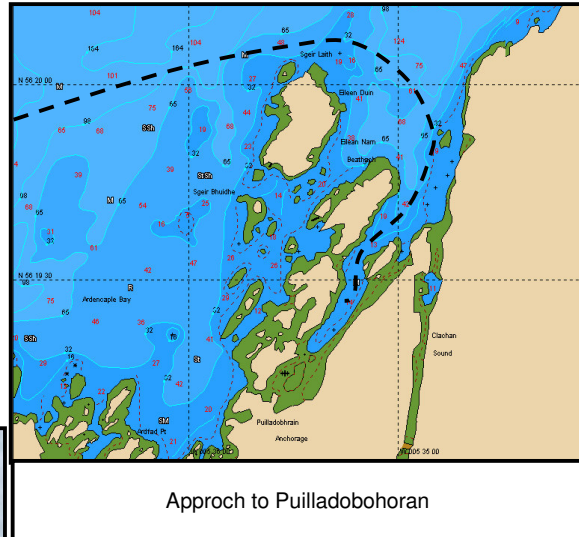


Inevitably, the wind headed, and we had to tack up the Sound, but it was easy sailing with a strengthening weather-going tide. The Sound of Luing is like many other major passages, such as Chenal du Four, Alderney Race, and even the Needles Channel. When benign, they are easy, but they can also be killers. We were lucky, but I was later to read a less gentle account in Cowper's *Sailing Tours*<sup>4</sup> of the passage of what he calls the Sound of Scarba, which is his name for the Sound of Luing.

By 1245 we were just NE of Fladda, and the wind died, so the engine went on again, but only for 20 minutes as the wind filled again as we passed Easdale. We drifted gently along helped by the tide, and eventually drifted into Puilladobhrain at 1430, where, among about 4 other boats, we found a comfortable spot to anchor.



Entering Puilladobhrain



It is easy to see why it is such a popular spot. A completely protected anchorage with wonderful views, easy depths, and good holding. This was our first real Scottish anchorage, and we just enjoyed being there.

To our surprise, we looked up after lunch to see that *Sea Jade* had anchored 20 metres away. She is another Rustler whose owners, Peter and Maureen Bates, were well known to us – we had missed them at Ardfarn. They promptly invited us over, and Peter collected Dairne, but I was determined to get the dinghy over and clean off all the Solent stain from the hull. It looked like oil, but came off so easily with oxalic acid, that I am forced to wonder if it was not due to the algal bloom that we had seen before we left Southampton water. The job was quickly done, and I rowed over and enjoyed a chat with the *Sea Jades*.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Cowper [*Sailing Tours*, Vol V] quotes from the letters of Dr MacCulloch to Sir Walter Scott: "Dr MacCulloch says 'Unless it be the passage of Dorus Mor, Kyle Rich and Kyle Akin, there is hardly anything throughout all the W. islands more amusing than the passage of the Sound of Scarba. Landsmen generally think themselves safe when they are near their own proper element, but here the rawest is tempted to doubt his security when he sees himself surrounded on all sides by rocks and islands, buffeting a sea that invades him before, behind and all round, and whisked by whirlpools and currents that are running in all manner of directions at the same moment. With a head sea, a beating wind, and a favouring tide it is perfection. It is not less so when the wind and sea are favourable, and the current at odds with both, particularly if the man at the helm never held a tiller except on the Crinan canal. But the sea is not forever raging in the Sound of Scarba, I once crossed it in a toy of a yawl with a single boatman at six on a July morning, when the sky was without a cloud and the air without a breeze. The water would have been smooth if it could. It was, indeed, glassy, but it was a torrent of melting and boiling glass streaming and whirling in all sorts of evolutes and involutes of curves, and running forward all the time like a millstream, whirlpools, curves and all. The poor little wherry went up and down, and sideways, and forwards, and backwards, and round about, and I thought it fortunate I did not go to the bottom. Yet after thus quadrilling it for twenty miles to get over a space of two, we landed on Luing, no one well knew how'.





*Ariadne* in Puilladobhrain

Peter and Maureen have been to Norway, and have kept their boat on the West Coast of Scotland since it was built, but have now moved their base to Tayvallah. They are really intrepid, and casually talk of good fishing off the Torran Rocks, and recommended visiting Loch Moidart, for which there is no current chart!

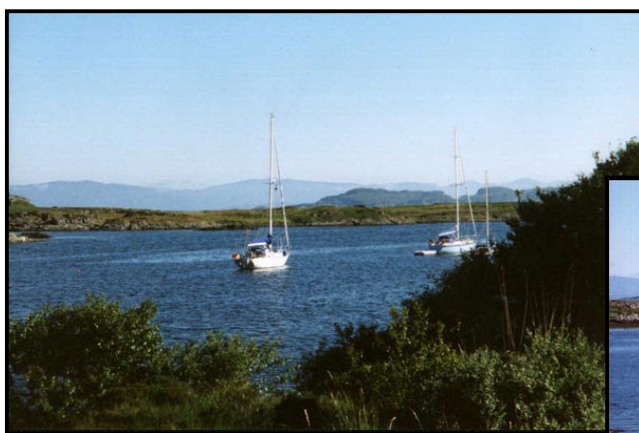


Longest day - it never became fully dark

They were on their way through Cuan Sound and had only stopped at Puilladobhrain to wait for the tide. So we got out of their way and wished them well.

That evening, the longest day of the year, we were able to read in the cabin without light at 2230, and it did not really get fully dark for the next few days.

## Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> June: Puilladobhrain to Tobermory



*Ariadne* in Puilladobhrain

I was up early, leaving Dairne asleep. It was a glorious morning, with fog sitting over Kerrera and on the Mull mountains, while we



Dairne tackling the rough ground

were in bright sunshine with a clear sky.





Now we had really got into our cruising area, we felt we had to go ashore and explore a little.

After breakfast we went for a walk over the hill to see Clachan Bridge. It was a good test for Dairne's walking boots, and she found the hiking stick a real boon on the rough ground.

There was little wind, and we were expecting to motor all the way to Tobermory when we left at 1200. We saw several 'dolphins' as we crossed the Firth of Lorne, although I think they were probably porpoises.



Clachan Bridge - the "Bridge over the Atlantic"



Mountains on Mull from the Sound of Mull

past the Yule Rocks. It was the next day that I discovered that the small C-Map cartridges do not zoom uniformly, and there are 'missing' layers. Carry on zooming, the detail appears! So I had been unfair on C-Map!

At 1345 a gentle SE breeze filled in so we sailed for a while, but by 1500, a sea breeze had filled in – on the nose again!. We motored all the way up the Sound of Mull finding a free mooring to Tobermory at 1650.



Tobermory

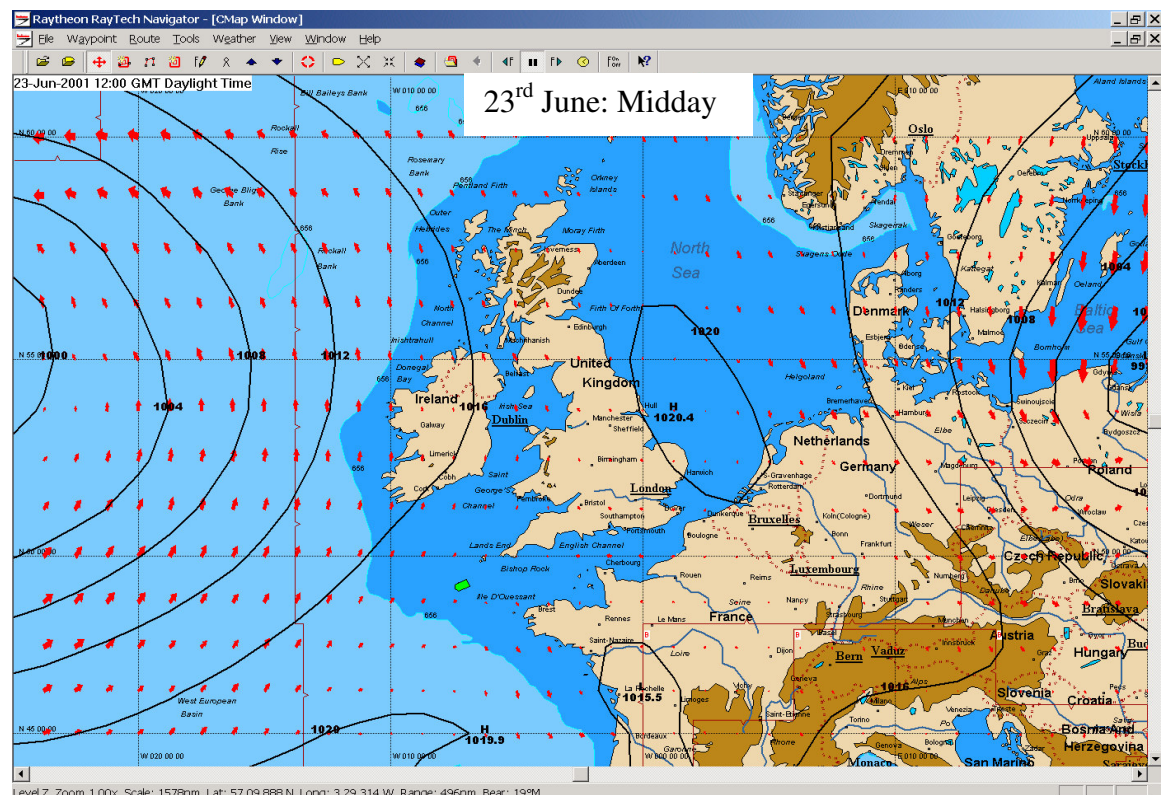
It had been a pity to motor up the Sound, but we had had enough of headwinds. The sunshine was enjoyable though!



## Saturday 23- Sunday 24 June; Loch Sunart

What next? That was the issue. We had thought of taking the advice of one of the *Shemar* crew and going out to Coll, but a SE forecast was not an attractive proposition in the anchorage there. Visibility was suspect, so we were not keen to go to Moidart. We considered going to Canna, recommended by Mike and Rosemary Cubitt, but it was 30 miles. We wanted something easier.

The weather was strange, with a complex depression in the Atlantic, said to be slow moving. Such beasts can be a nuisance and produce 'soggy' weather with unsure visibility, as this one did. In the end, we opted to go into Loch Sunart, which several people had told us was very beautiful.

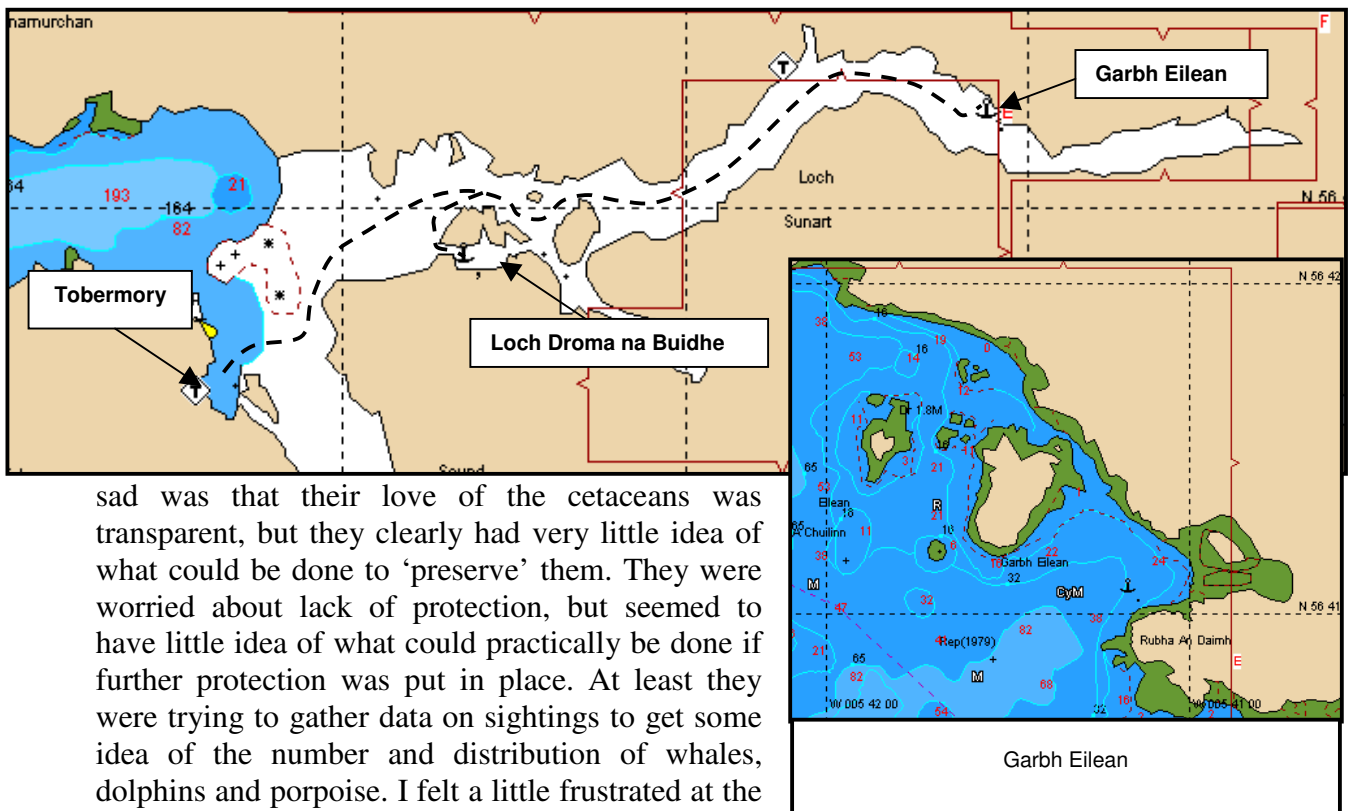


We were not in a hurry, so we spent the morning ashore, topping up stores and doing the tourist bit.





A call into the Highland Whale and Dolphin Society shop was interesting. There were two lasses there – the cuddly one who talked a lot, and the thin one, dressed mainly in black who said very little – a True Believer! The talkative one had clearly given up a chunk of her annual leave to work for the Society, and was ever so keen. What was



sad was that their love of the cetaceans was transparent, but they clearly had very little idea of what could be done to ‘preserve’ them. They were worried about lack of protection, but seemed to have little idea of what could practically be done if further protection was put in place. At least they were trying to gather data on sightings to get some idea of the number and distribution of whales, dolphins and porpoise. I felt a little frustrated at the lack of focus and clear goals, but that stems from my job, and I have now retired!!!

We dropped the mooring at 1400, and set off across the Sound, skirting the rocky patch before heading into Sunart. It is a spectacular loch, but has a few hidden rocks that need careful pilotage.



Motoring up Loch Sunart in the rain!



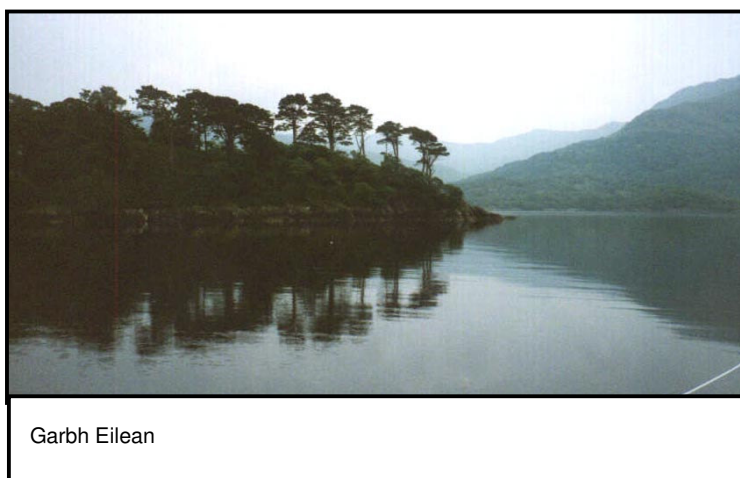
*Ariadne* at Garbh Eilean

We worked our way past Risqua and the island of Carna, noting yachts tucked away in various corners. A real Scots mizzle developed, but it was not cold. The wind was patchy, and by





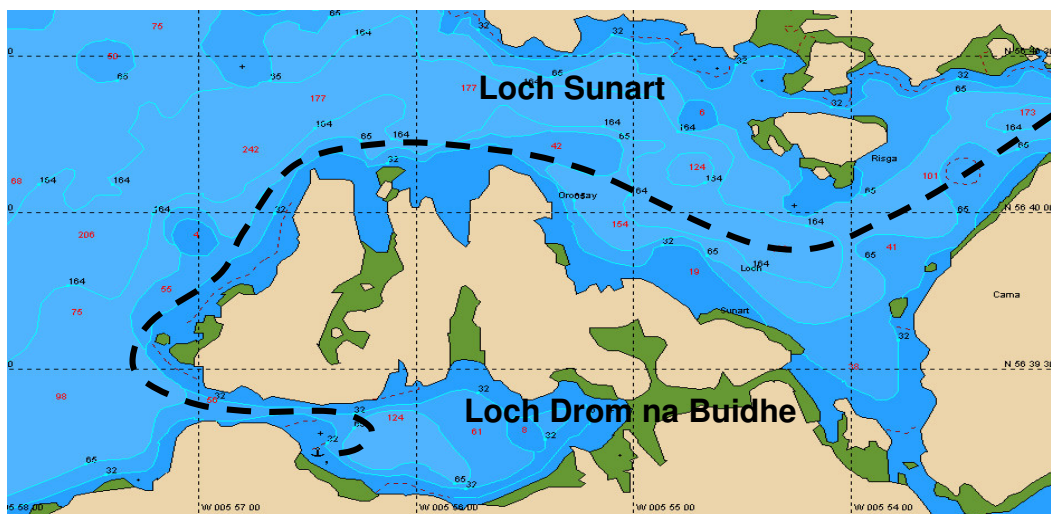
1630 we were under power, plodding up the loch, past Salen to find an exquisite anchorage behind an island well up the loch. All to ourselves. This is what we came for!



Garbh Eilean

We were anchored in about 10m at high water, but the anchor held firm.

It was a peaceful night.



Early next morning, the sun shone, and it was incredibly beautiful. We wanted to get the help of the ebb down the loch, so left at 0925, quickly making sail. There followed a long drift in gentle, fickle breezes, sometimes making 3.5kts, sometimes going round 360° as we lost steerage way and the wind filled in from a different direction. Passing Carna, a nice E breeze filled in for the passage back to Loch Drom na Buidhe (Loch Drumbuie), a large pool with a narrow entrance, where we anchored at 1315.



Entering Loch Drumbuie



There followed a very lazy afternoon. We had been making longish legs for over two weeks, and the couple of days pottering about in Loch Sunart had been essential therapy.

We were anchored close to trees on the shore and it was a warm evening so the midge screens were deployed for the first time, very successfully.



Anchored in Loch Drumbuie

Ardnamurchan beckoned, just visible from the loch entrance, and we were looking forward to seeing the small isles Rum, Eigg Muck and Canna, and to seeing the Cuillins on Skye.



It looked like the weather was set to improve



## *Round Ardnamurchan*

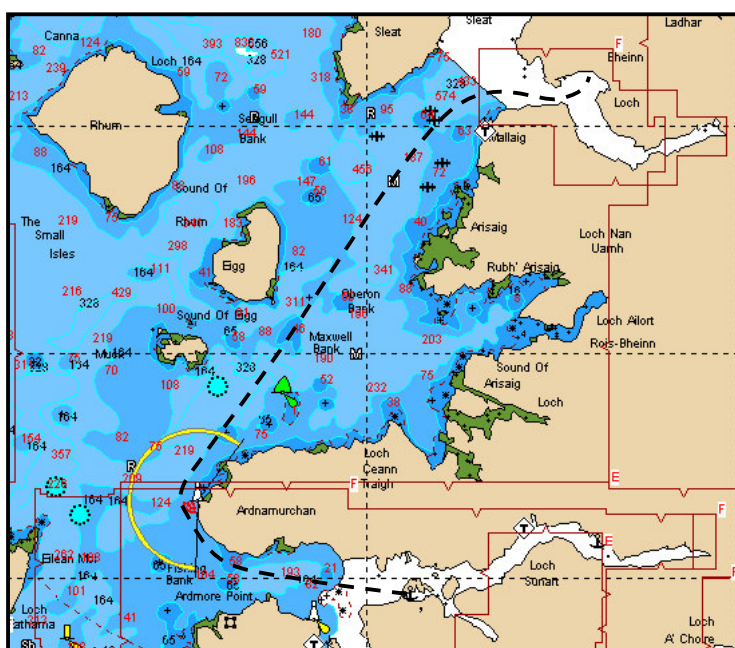
**Monday 25<sup>th</sup> June: Loch Drumbuie to Inverie**



Looking out of Loch Drumbuie at Ardnamurchan

I was apprehensive about rounding Ardnamurchan. Channel sailors may remember the first time they rounded Portland. There is much the same atmosphere, as Ardnamurchan really is a dividing line between the sheltered Sounds of Mull and Jura and the more exposed area round the Small Isles and on to Skye. It is also a tidal gate and has a reputation for large swell. With a South East wind forecast, once round it, we would be committed (without punching adverse tide to regain the shelter of the Sound of Mull). We had already seen how the forecasts could be upset by local conditions, winds deflected by the hills, or sea breezes arrive from strange directions, such as the NW wind down the sound of Mull when we motored against it to Tobermory. I did not yet have the ‘feel’ of the area, in the way that I have for the Solent. Clearly this was going to be an interesting experience.

But there was something more subtle too. We were now entering a new phase where the sailing is less important than the sights, the places, the choices of where to go and the sheer ambience of the place. Clearly the log would have to reflect this somehow, and I was not at all sure I could do it. You can now judge the result for yourself.



From Loch Drumbuie to Loch Nevis





With a forecast SE light becoming 3/4 (and only moderate visibility), I passage planned for Arisaig which would give us run of 20-25 miles.



First time round Ardnamurchan!

At 1100 we weighed and motored out of the loch in almost a flat calm. We were almost out to Ardnamurchan before any breeze appeared. Instead of the forecast SE wind the breeze was SSW, and later veered to SW. It freshened slightly as we reached up to Ardnamurchan light where we bore away at 1315 heading for the SE corner of Eigg. The mountains of Rum were clearly visible, with their heads in the clouds, and Muck was in the foreground.



Eigg, with Rum in background

Progress was good, so we re-planned to go on to Inverie in Loch Nevis, one of the places that Mike and Rosemary Cubitt had recommended.

As we approached Eigg we took some photos with a yacht in the foreground, called them on the vhf and got an address so we can send some prints later.

Two gybes took us round the tip of Eigg, then the pole was set so we could run towards Mallaig and Loch Nevis. Skye and cloud-covered Cuillins were visible. There was cloud over the land, but we were in sunshine. The wind, probably brought down by the hills on Eigg, freshened for a while so that at one point we had 20kt apparent, but by 1645 it had died away, and we motored the rest of the way to Inverie.

Loch Nevis is almost inaccessible by road, and we had never even seen it before. It is a typically spectacular sea loch with towering hills around it, including one behind Inverie village that rises to 2600ft.



All the visitors' buoys (4 of them) were full, so we anchored, at the second attempt. The holding is dubious, but it promised to be a still night. As it was past 1900, we rushed ashore in the dinghy to the pub, where Dairne had a huge plate of langoustines. The food was excellent, and not too expensive.



Approaching Inverie, Loch Nevis

Walking back to the dinghy, we met Liz and Dave Bradbury, who joined us on board for coffee. They had looked at a Rustler (way back in Ralph Hogg days at Orion) and had even had a trial sail. In the end they had settled on a Barbican 35, in which they have cruised to Norway and the Azores. They were great company, and offered us the use of their mooring at Badacro in Loch Gairloch – a nice gesture. They are both active walkers and were intending to go up the 2600 ft peak behind the village the next day.

As we settled down for the night, a few midges appeared and the screens were again deployed, and solved the problem.

For the record, there was no Vodaphone signal at Inverie – not surprising!

## Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> June: To Upper Loch Nevis and Kyleakin

We decided to go up through the Kyles on the evening tide, which allowed a gentle start. Good idea! Dairne is bad at mornings! Even so, we had plenty of time, and we weighed at 1015 with the idea of at least seeing Upper Loch Nevis. This involved some tricky pilotage through the narrows, past some delightful holiday cottages. The channel is twisty, and the tide was just beginning to ebb when we got there. We found our way through.



Upper Loch Nevis - full of foreboding



Narrows to Upper L Nevis

Upper Loch Nevis is a secret world of steep mountains falling in to deep water. It is the kind of place children's adventure stories imagine. Only hardened walkers and yachtsmen can get there. We spent a quarter of an hour taking in the threatening ambience, but decided to go back through the narrows before the tide built up to its full strength, reputed to exceed 8kts on springs.





Safely back through the narrows, we rounded into Tarbet on the south side of the loch.

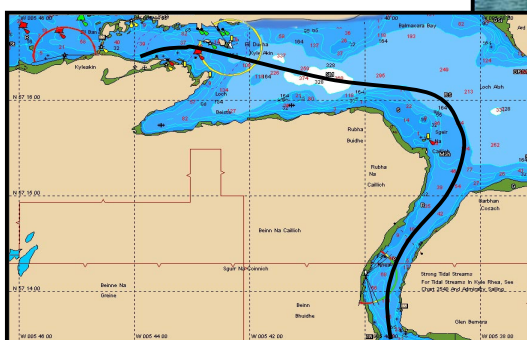
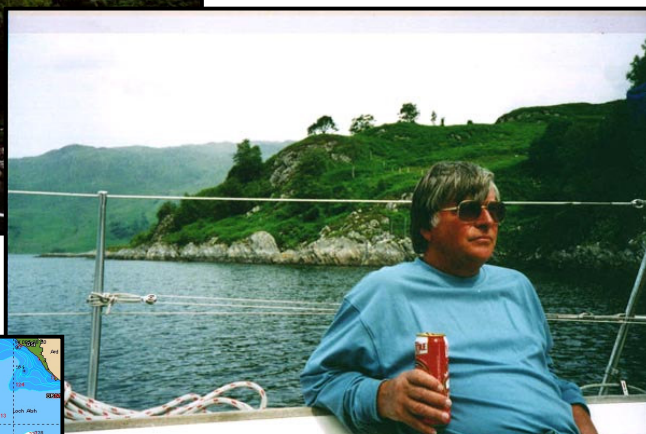


Loch Tarbet, Loch Nevis

And we took pictures of each other!



Tarbet Loch Nevis



Through Kyle Rhea to Kyleakin

It took over an hour from 1400 to motor from Tarbet to the entrance of Loch Nevis, where a N wind gradually filled in. This was in line with forecast, but only a slight





shift to the west would allow us to lay along the Sound of Sleat. The tide was due to go favourable at the Kyles at about 1815.

We took a long starboard tack across the Sound with a couple of rolls in the genoa. Despite the adverse tide we were going quite well, but it looked like we were in for a long beat. On the far shore, not far from Armadale, we tacked. Within minutes, we picked up a lift, and the wind increased. Before long we had tucked a reef in the main, and gradually eased the sheets until we were reaching at 6-7kts towards the Kyles. This lasted until we were well past Isleornsay. As we came under the lee of the hills, the wind died, and gradually came on the nose as it was channelled down the valley. The genoa was rolled and we motored the rest of the way, finding the tide on the turn as we went through Kyle Rhea, eventually picking up a HIE buoy off Kyleakin at 1850, where we settled down for the night.



Kyle Rhea from the south

### Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> June: Kyleakin to Portree.

We had a still night, and the next morning, there was no wind at all. Low lying mist wrapped the hills, but there was a slight threat of sunshine, but that did not materialise later. We motored over to Kyle of Lochalsh where there is a new pontoon close to the shops. I filled up with water while Dairne topped up our stores. The question was, where now?

There was little point in going a long way as we wanted to explore the Inner Sound, but equally, Kyleakin and Kyle of Lochalsh felt like busy metropolises with traffic rumbling over the new Skye Bridge (which is a lot less impressive than we had expected).

We decided to motor up to Portree, the Capital of Skye! It was an uneventful trip, but kept us close to interesting islands in the moderate visibility. It was so still all the way that we did not even bother to open the stakwrap.

As we approached Portree, we thought about going on a little, partly because deteriorating weather could mean



Portree waterfront

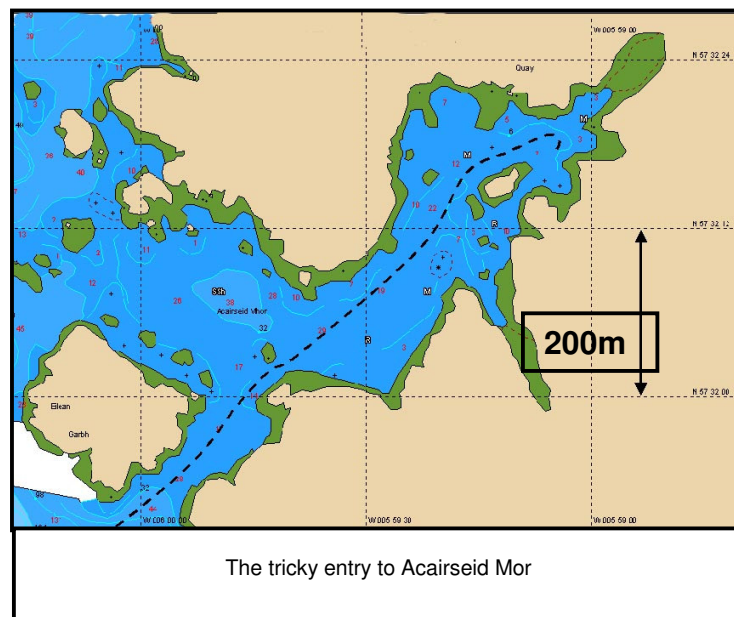


being stuck in Portree. But to the north, the visibility looked dreadful, so we stuck to the plan, and found an HIE buoy off Portree. There are eight there, and only one other was occupied.

The weather deteriorated into a soggy highland evening, so we had another round of the world scrabble championship. I won by 2 points.

#### **Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> June: Portree to Acairseid Mhor**

The weather started out with low cloud and a little rain. We went ashore to get rid of rubbish and do some shopping – for the things Dairne had forgotten the day before! We also arranged to top up with fuel from the jetty. The pilot book suggests that fuel is only available in 10 gallon lots from BP. While BP still have a distribution depot there, fuel is now available as required from the harbourmaster. They were helpful and it was quick, once the new delivery (from BP!) had been completed.



We knew the weather was deteriorating and that we were in for a day's rain, and possibly a minor blow too. We decided to try the interesting Acairseid Mor harbour on Rona as a hiding place.



By 1230 we had full sail up broad reaching across the Sound of Raasay. A gybe took us back on track towards Rona – or nearly so. The genoa was dropped so we could dead run to the waypoint.



Without question, the best anchorage of the cruise

About 2 cables out, all sail was dropped as we went through the complex and tricky entry channel between a headland and a rock lying only two or three lengths off. It was difficult to slow to a safe speed, but we crept in to find that there was a mooring buoy free. Following Martin Lawrence's directions in the Imray pilot, we called



Almost the ship's mascot - one up on a parrot!

"Rona Lodge" on channel 12. They were happy for us to use the buoy, so we lassoed it, and found a strong rope with an eye underneath it.

We were in Acairseid Mhor<sup>5</sup>, one of the best harbours on the West coast – once you have found your way in! The CCC pilot is factually blunt about the obstacles, but Martin Lawrence even suggests in the Imray pilot that much of the information is apocryphal and needs to be treated with considerable caution. The history of the island in Hamish Haswell Smith's wonderful

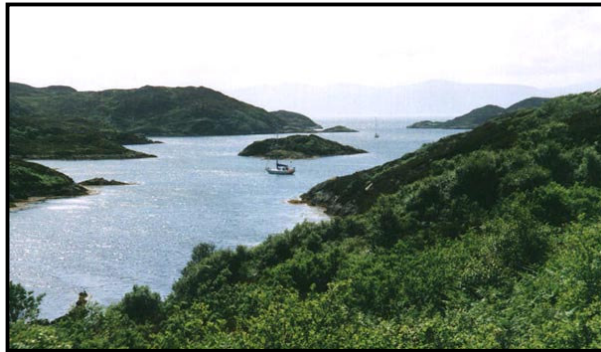
<sup>5</sup> This [Acairseid Mor] is a port only to be attempted by those ardent mariners who have failed to get wrecked when attempting others equally difficult. There are always chances left for the lucky – Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours Vol V*





book on Scottish Islands is also fascinating. The island is made of Lewisian gneiss, one of the oldest rocks on the planet. It was idyllic!

As the island is privately owned and we were using their mooring, it seemed only courteous to go ashore and say 'hello'. At the cottage, grandiosely called Rona Lodge, we were met first by two lively sheepdogs who shepherded us to the door, passing a baby highland bull in the front garden. This looked promising!



Acairseid Mor

At the door we were met by Raymond (who could be mistaken for Billy Connolly) and his wife Mary. They seemed delighted to see us, and apparently we were the first yacht in 100 to call them up on arrival. We were invited into their cottage for a cup of tea.

We learned that they had been there less than a year as wardens for the island. The owner, a Danish lady, wants to restore the island to its natural state, with native woodland. All sheep have been removed, but there is still a pod of Highland cattle that roam the island, including a bull who is said to be friendly unless a human shows fear. The calf in the garden had been orphaned when the mother died when it was three days old, and they had hand reared it. Apparently, Highland cattle just go off on their own and give birth unaided. None of the other cows had been willing to take on the orphan.

Raymond had been a chef on the oil rigs, and at one time or another had run his own restaurant, but they had decided to abandon the Aberdeen rat race, and heard about the job by accident when Mary had taken a brief holiday on Raasay. Clearly they were adapting to it well. The biggest obstacle had been when their fresh water supply froze for three weeks in the winter – it is piped down from a tarn in the hills above, then filtered. They had had to learn the arts of island living – such as only being able to go to the shops or the bank every two weeks. It looked like they were really coming to terms with it, and thoroughly enjoying living – albeit in a comfortable cottage – with highland cattle, eagles and wilderness.



21<sup>st</sup> century "Vital Spark"!

Several projects were under way. Already, a water tap had been put on the beach to assist visitors. The cottage offered laundry facilities, showers and toilets. Plans were



in hand to develop another building on the island as self-catering cottages. Indeed, the next morning a landing craft – the modern equivalent of the *Vital Spark* – arrived to land a lot of building materials, a dumper truck and a crawler digger with a spike that was intended mainly to improve the track on the island to make it suitable for tractors. For the time being, Raymond's only mode of transport is a quad bike.

Since May they had logged just over 100 yacht visits, and had the names of most of the visiting vessels. Not everyone got in touch with them, so their records are incomplete. A recent visitor – only a couple of days before us - had been Martin Lawrence on his first visit to the island in over 10 years.

As we sat there, another tiny yacht came in to the harbour and anchored. As we went back to *Ariadne*, we invited them to join us later for coffee. Rick Atkinson (the owner) and his crew Mike Parkin had sailed *Tumult* from Arisaig, (where she is based) round the South of Skye, over to the Hebrides and round the top to Acairseid Mhor. *Tumult* was the prototype Drascombe, and is 23ft with only 5ft beam and a small cuddy – a lively boat in which to cruise these waters! The drop keel had been replaced with a fixed fin of considerable draft. Rick had sailed with Chris Elliot (another Rustler owner) on at least one of the two trips he had made to the Antarctic as a dog handler. Now he lives a more sedate existence at Fort William. What an intrepid pair!



*Tumult*

Until this recent trip, Acairseid Mhor had been Rick's favourite highland anchorage – but he has found a new one near Benbecula that could rival Rona!

The next morning dawned with heavy rain, as forecast. There were a few gusts too, and as the day wore on, the wind gradually increased. We hibernated during the morning, but after lunch we were able to go ashore and climb



The main road on Rona

to the crest of the island, with magnificent views back to the anchorage and across the Inner Sound to the Torridon mountains.



The mainland from Rona





This was an incredible walk. First we went up a steep rocky path. On the plateau there was a peat bog which took some negotiating, then gently downwards through thicketed trees to our first view of *Ariadne* in the harbour. Then we climbed slowly up a long valley to the ridge of the island. We were conscious that these were some of the oldest rocks on earth, some 2500 million years old. According to Hamish Haswell Smith, they had been in the



Looking towards Gairloch



Rona

Southern Ocean when they first emerged, and only migrated slowly with continental drift to their present situation. They are so old there are no fossils – except the two of us walking slowly through this terrific wilderness.

On the way back we took advantage of the showers. There were no charges for this service (or for the mooring), although there was a voluntary contribution box to which we added a few pounds.

*Tumult* had left at about 0900, but three more yachts arrived (one a large Nelson motor cruiser) during the afternoon. One can foresee that improving the facilities on the island could make it so popular that permanent moorings will be the only way to accommodate the crowds. What a pity that would be!

It had been a tiring walk and the evening was spent mainly in recovering. Later that evening, the rain returned, and forecast was getting decidedly not nice!



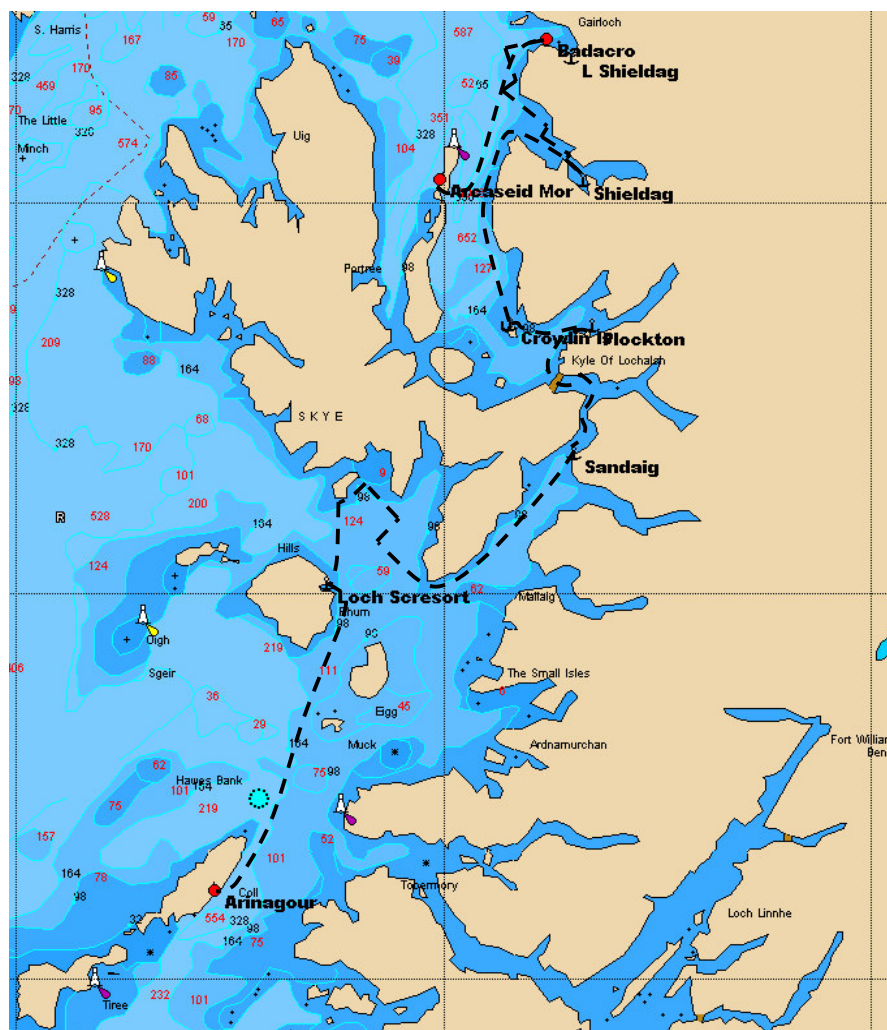
They use quad bikes on this road!



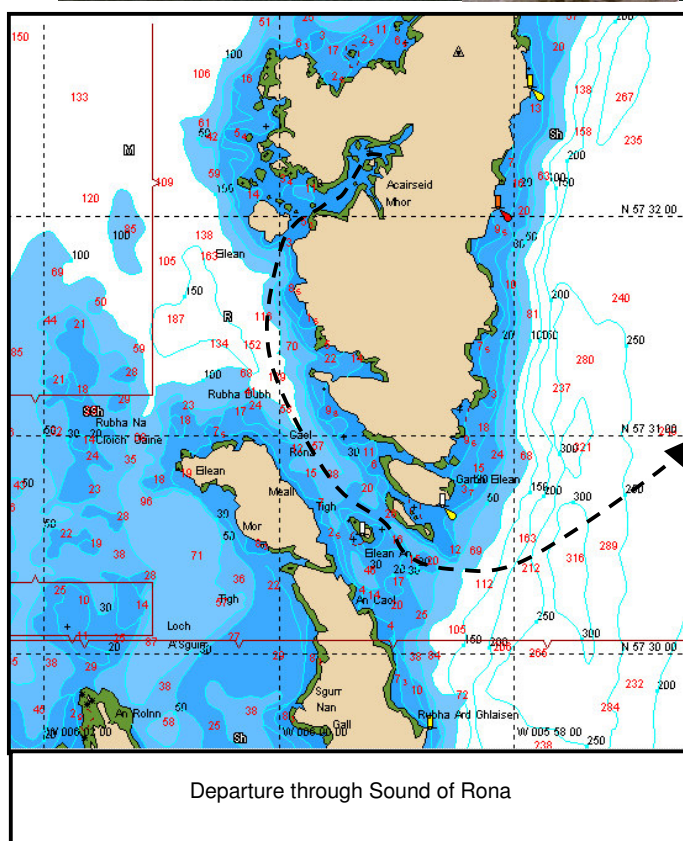


## Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June: Acairseid Mhor to Badacro

During the night, the forecast blow had happened, probably gusting to F6, but we were comfortable. We were now expecting SW 4, possibly 5. We decided to go only as far as Loch Gairloch, where we had been offered the use of their mooring by the owners of *Na Mara*. We could have reached the Summer Isles, but the forecast was so uncertain, we felt the intermediate stop would allow us more choices. Although we still had plenty of time to get back to Oban to pick up Iain and Clare for the Classic Malt cruise, we did not want to put ourselves in a position where it would be a fight to get there. It looked like we were in for a cold front, followed by a vigorous Atlantic depression. As there had been no mobile phone availability at Acairseid Mhor, we had not seen a weather map for some time, and were reliant on Navtex and Coastguard VHF.



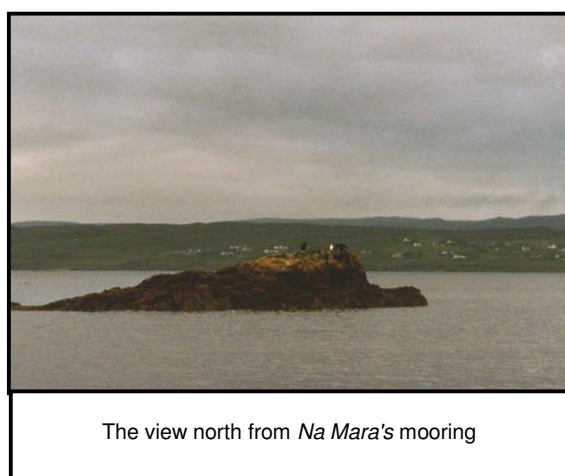
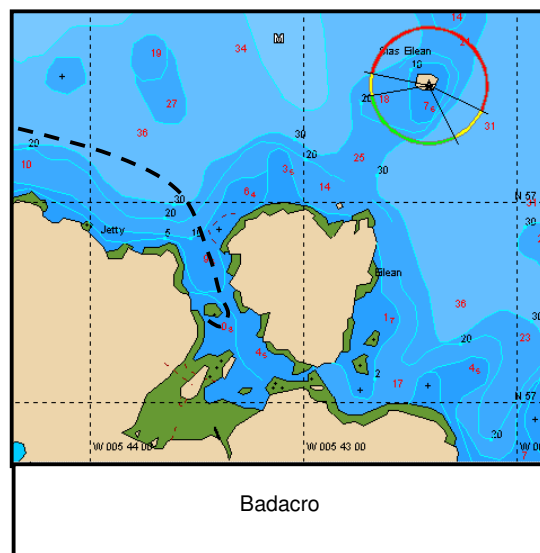
We were almost sorry to leave this wonderful place. It is a very special place. But the forecast was, frankly, dire in the medium term and if we were to be stranded for a few days, we needed to move to somewhere new. It is certain, however, likely that Acairseid Mhor was highlight of this cruise.



We called Raymond and Mary on channel 12 to thank them for their welcome, dropped the buoy and motored slowly out of Acairseid Mhor. Then, with genoa set we sailed (with a little engine help) through Caol Rona into the Inner Sound. We had decided to try running under genoa only, but after an hour, we rolled the genoa and set the main so we could run almost dead downwind to Loch Gairloch, where we arrived at 1500, finding *Na Mara's* mooring, close to the entrance.

The wind died during the evening, and one always wonders whether we shouldn't have been a bit more ambitious. But it had been a leisurely passage, with views of Torridon, including the mountains poking up into the clouds, a heavy rain shower and a few gusts.

During the passage, Vodafone came on stream, and we were able to speak to Betty to let her know all was well, and to Neil and his family who were making a visit to our house to check the mail, show off their children to great grandparents, and keep the insurance on our house valid!



These were gentler surroundings. Trees, cosy holiday cottages, a group of permanent yacht moorings and a small village. Very green, and much softer than the harsh raw environment of Rona. Each has its place. Rona had been challenging (even though the harbour must be one of the best on this coast), but this was restful, considering how dreadful the weather was outside.

## Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July: Loch Shieldaig



We really wanted to go on to the Summer Isles, but the weather was grim, with poor visibility and drizzle. It was cold too. The Summer Isles are magnificent, but we could not really see the point in going there to sit around in wet and fog. The prospects for the next few days were uncertain, with the possibility of strong SW winds. Already we were beginning to have to think of the passage back to Oban for the Classic Malt Cruise. In the end, we realised that there is no need to 'tick the sites off the list'. We

did not need to drive ourselves, so we decided to stay put.



Shieldaig, Loch Gairloch

However, I needed an hour of engine running to charge the batteries, so we motored round the corner into Loch Shieldaig, a quiet corner surrounded by trees, where we had lunch. This was really being lazy! But why not?

It was bleak when we returned to the mooring in the early afternoon, so plans to go ashore were shelved and the afternoon was wiled away with yet another round of the world scrabble championship. It was a pity not to get ashore as it looked an attractive spot. We were to hear later that Jim Yarrow and his crew had gone ashore and had a very warm welcome.



Badacro village from the mooring

## Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> July Badacro, Gairloch to Loch Shieldaig, Torridon

So we had abandoned the Summer Isles for the time being. But we both wanted to go to Torridon which had happy memories of years past. We had sat outside the pub at Shieldaig in Torridon dreaming of having our own boat anchored between the pub and the island.

While the rest of the country was recovering from a heat wave, we donned our heavy weather gear, and made sail at 0830. Motoring clear of Badacro, we set a single reefed main, and a genoa with several rolls. It was not enough sail at first, but our choice was vindicated as we cleared the headland, and we even put a second reef in the main as the apparent wind exceeded 23kts.



A glimpse into Upper Loch Torridon



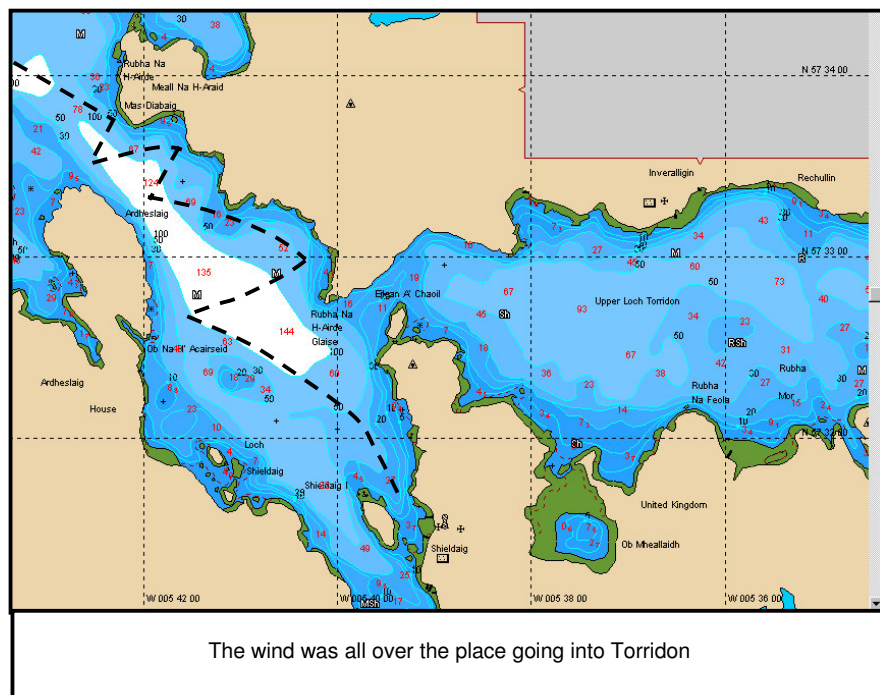


The theory was that, with a SW 4/5 forecast we would sail clear of the loch, tack and make 5 miles to Red Point, then crack the sheets for a fast reach up Torridon.

At first, all looked well, and we tacked almost parallel with the shore, but we were headed as the wind backed. It took two more tacks to clear Red Point, and as we entered the loch, the wind was channelled so we ended up with a beat all the way. Even so, the water was relatively flat. Making the same passage in the Channel would have meant facing a 1.5 m metre swell. This is an incredible cruising area!

At one point we thought the wind had dropped as we were in the lee of the loch, and shook out a reef. Mistake! 15 minutes later we put the reef back, and gradually fought our way up the loch. At times the wind gusted to 31kts.

Going through the narrows, the wind was all over the place. We had to make a number of tacks to cope with violent shifts, but eventually we were through.





We motored the last mile into Shieldaig to find that we were the only boat there – except for a small dinghy with an outboard. Almost immediately after we were anchored they were alongside.

“Would you like a pair of crabs mister?”

“How much?” says I

“Two pounds”

“What each?” Says Dairne

“No, for the pair”, say the urchins

So we bought two crabs

Then, for a while, the sun shone, and Torridon was beautiful.

I had intended to go ashore to get rid of rubbish, but by the time the match at Wimbledon between Sampras and his Swiss opponent Federer had been settled, the wind had returned, and cloud was down again. So I stayed on board.

My little sister, a Buddhist, would have been appalled as I put the two



Shieldaig, Loch Torridon



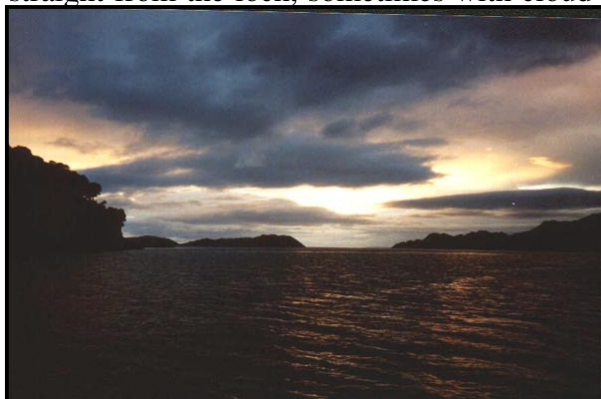
Fresh crab supper!

live crabs to sleep in warm water and cooked them. Dairne took them apart and we enjoyed a delightful meal with a bottle of Muscadet as accompaniment. As we didn't have any crab tools on board<sup>6</sup>, the toolbox was raided for various pliers, grippers and screwdrivers.

At various times we had strong gusts, rain and all kinds of cloud patterns, but by 2000 the wind had died. This was in line with the forecast, which suggested a light period, with the wind going northerly later, suggesting an early start the next day.

We were in one of the most beautiful places. Near us were mountains rising 3000 ft straight from the loch, sometimes with cloud wrapped rounds them, sometimes clear.

Occasionally lenticular clouds were piled up over the peaks like a Mille Feuille



A wild sunset at Torridon...



...but it calmed down

We rang the family, partly in case we missed mother's birthday, but also to thank Neil for all his and Tamsin's efforts over the weekend. It makes a huge difference to know the house and the mail are being checked, and just letting the great grandparents see Christopher and Kendra is worth so much. They have been a wonderful support!

After the crab supper was cleared away, when the rain had stopped and the wind had died away, we stood silent in the cockpit, just soaking up the atmosphere. On the

island close to us, and along the lochside, there were trees. Above them, were the crags reaching up to the mountains, and above that, the sky. We had been here by car, and dreamed of sailing our own boat to this anchorage. We were fulfilling that dream, and it was every bit as wonderful as we had imagined.

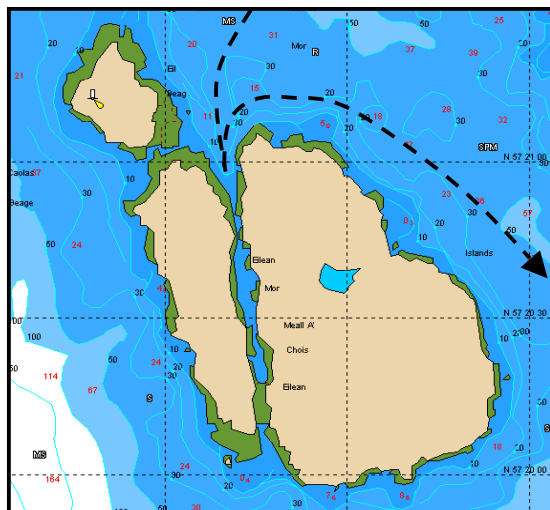
## Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> & Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> July: Loch Shildaig to Plockton

There was no wind so we motored from Shildaig to Plockton, with a lunchtime stop at the Crowlin Islands. As we motored clear of Torridon, the mist was down on the mountains. We saw strips of mist as the sky lifted for a while, the mountains poking through. There was a



A very grey morning, south of Torridon

pearly quality to the light. The seabirds seemed to be oppressed by the lack of weather, with guillemots congregating in groups on the sea.



Crowlin Islands

From time to time, Rona and Skye appeared through the mist, then they were lost in more rain. Occasionally we saw a fishing boat out to check his lines of pots. On the whole, we were on our own. What at first appeared to be a strange seamark turned out to be a diesel submarine, idling slowly northwards.





Crowlin Sound

The most amazing thing about this anchorage was the bird song. Land birds were there in plenty, as well as a few ubiquitous gulls. It was a serene place, but with a northerly forecast, it was not a place to stay.

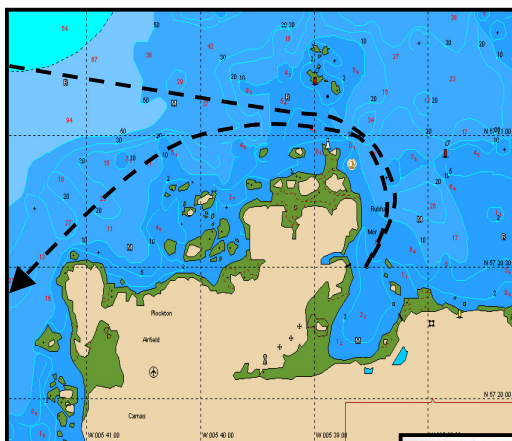
We decided to pop in to the north anchorage in the Crowlin Islands for lunch. By then the rain had stopped. There was already a boat anchored there, but there was plenty of room. This anchorage is little more than a cleft between the two islands as if God had struck down with a



"Rock Garden", Crowlin Sound

On one shore, there was a huge boulder that had been colonised by many plants. It brought a whole new meaning to the term "rock garden"!

After lunch we set off again, motoring all the way to Plockton. I was not sorry to give the engine a long run and build up the batteries.

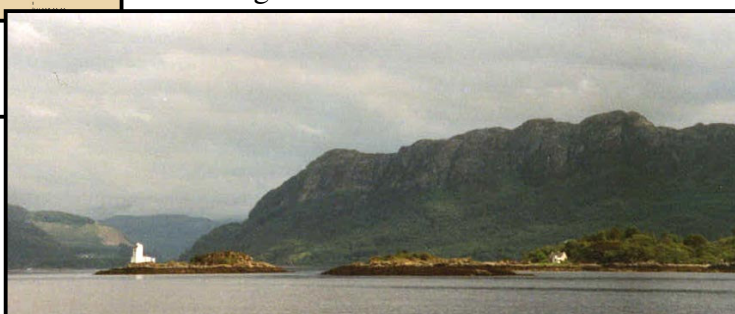


Plockton

As we rounded Cat Island into Plockton, the sun came out and we were to enjoy a hot afternoon at anchor, having found an initial spot at 1530. I went ashore to prospect and get rid of six bags of rubbish – a major problem for the modern cruiser! I realised there was a better anchorage further in, so we relocated.

We rang my mother on her birthday – she was delighted.

The evening remained still and pleasant, and we just

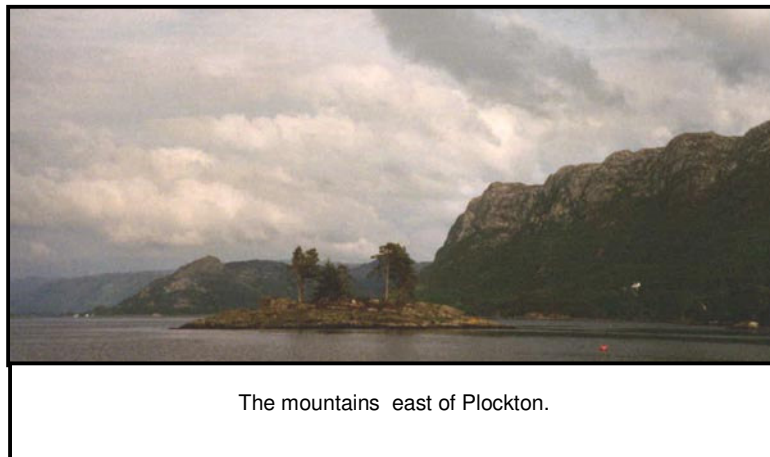


Approaching Cat island - Plockton to the right



enjoyed the soft, but spectacular scenery of Plockton, the nearby castle and the mountains.

The next morning we went ashore to get some shopping, and to do the traditional tourist thing. The first disaster was that a key bolt had fallen out of my barrow, so I had to carry the empty gas cylinder to the shop, which had just sold its last new cylinder – but they were expecting a delivery. We stocked up at the shop, and I went back on board with the shopping, breaking the wheels of the overloaded shopping trolley on the way. I mended the barrow, though. The tide had gone out even further when I got back to the pontoon, so I had to carry the outboard and dinghy 100 metres over soft wet sand, doing no good at all to the clean trousers I had put on that morning.



The mountains east of Plockton.

Lunch at the pub, then sat in the sun until the gas lorry arrived. Unfortunately, Dairne found an art gallery, and bought a painting! Then we found another studio where we found a proper Collins bird book, lots of other nice things, a delightful book on the area and spent far too much.

Back on board we tried, and failed, to mend the shopping trolley and otherwise just sat and enjoyed the delightful surroundings.

Towards the late afternoon we were given an indication of trouble in store when a Moody anchored nearby struggled to get an anchor loaded with kelp off the bottom. It is a general problem in Scotland, and we had had the same experience at Shieldag, and elsewhere.

At about 1800, the long forecast northerly started to fill in, but our judgement was that the anchorage would be tenable through the night, so we stayed put. We were right.

#### **Thursday: 5<sup>th</sup> July: Plockton to Sandaig**

We woke to find no wind and a cloud base of about 200ft. Not at all an attractive start to the day. We weighed anchor at 0830 and motored under the Skye Bridge to go



Kelp is plentiful in Scotland!

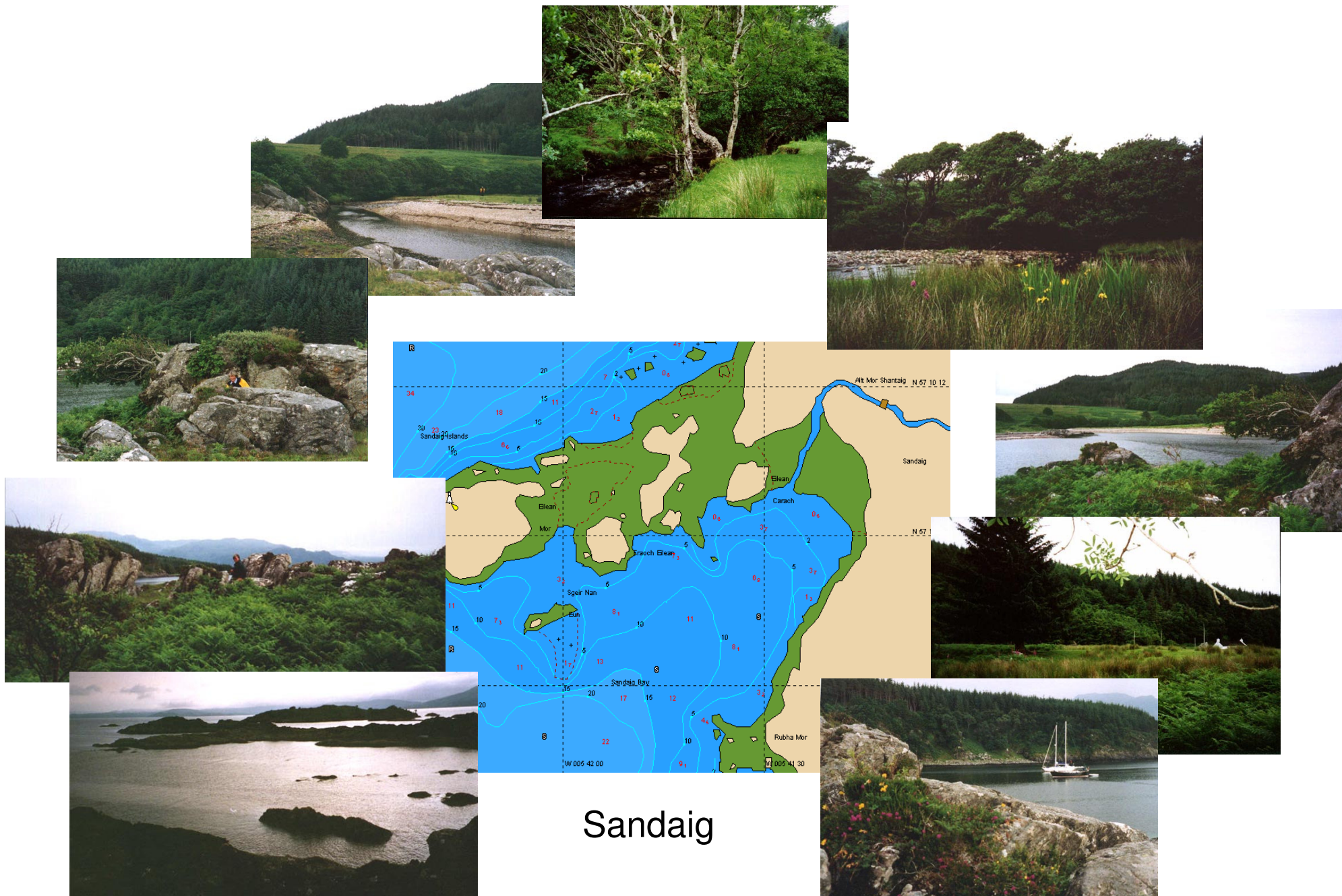


alongside the pontoon at Kyle of Lochalsh for water<sup>7</sup>. Then on again at 1030 – still with a low cloud base and dodgy visibility. Still motoring, we went through Kyle Rhea at more than 9.5kts on the tide.

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<sup>7</sup> It was to be the only place where we picked up water with an unpleasant taste

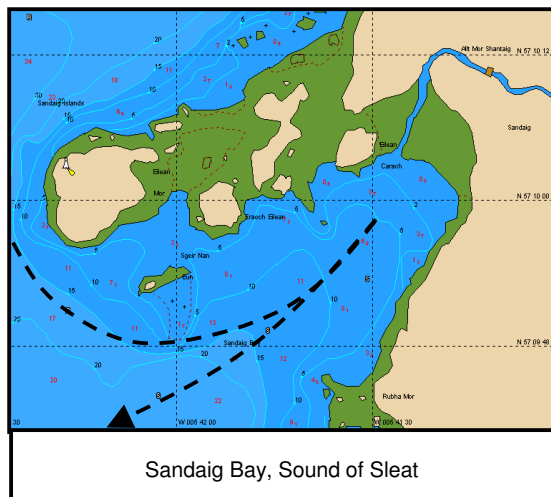




Sandaig



At 1030, we were well into the Sound of Sleat. We were fed up with motoring, so we set the main and ran gently with the tide. Dairne tried her hand at fishing while we drifted gently around hove to under main only. As the tide started to turn, there was no result from the fishing line, which was stowed away as we squared away for the short run to Sandaig, where we anchored at 1330.



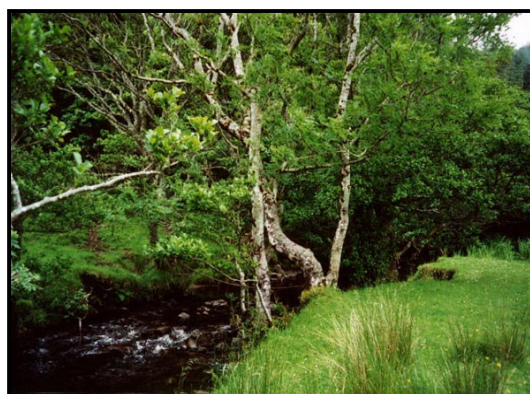
Sandaig Bay, Sound of Sleat

Reading 'Ring of Bright Water' by Gavin Maxwell had been one of the experiences that had built the dream of cruising in Scotland. Sandaig is the site of Camusfearna, Gavin Maxwell's cottage. We had managed to work out where it was and had camped just up on the road during the first holiday after we were married. That was in an old 15cwt Morris van, a slightly different proposition from *Ariadne*! However, we had not actually come down to the site, because at that time Maxwell was still alive and we did not wish to be intrusive.



The mouth of the burn at Sandaig

The beach has sand, pebbles and rock pools. Behind the beach is a soft grassy mound on which the original Camusfearna cottage stood. Now there is a memorial to Gavin Maxwell. Wild irises flower in abundance. At the back of the site is a large peaty beck which winds round the grassy mound, through tree lined dells and chuckles over grey stones before emptying into the sea at the back of the Sandaig Islands themselves, each of which is low, slightly craggy with a mass of wild flowers among low bushes. The whole site is nestled under a tree-clad hill.



The stream where the otters, Edal and Mijbil, played

I was reminded of the opening words of a lecture series on physics delivered by Richard Feynman, a quotation I have used when giving presentations on the environment. It reads as follows:





*"If we stand on the shore and look at the sea, we see the water, the waves breaking, the foam, the sloshing motion of the water, the sound, the air, the winds, and the clouds, the sun and the blue sky, and light; there is sand and there are rocks of various hardness and permanence, colour and texture. There are animals and seaweed, hunger and disease, and the observer on the beach; there may even be happiness and thought"*

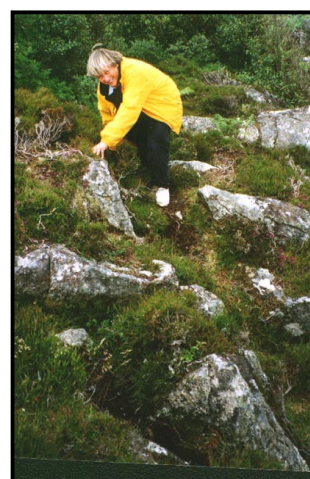
*"Is the sand other than the rocks? That is, is the sand perhaps nothing but a great number of very tiny stones? Is the moon a great rock? If we understand rocks, would we also understand sand and the moon? Is the wind a sloshing of air analogous to the sloshing motion of water in the sea?" - Richard Feynman*

This was quite a moving visit, and also memorable when we realised that today Ariadne had passed 15000 miles of voyaging. Perhaps we could come back another day and take better photographs in sunshine. But it is impossible to make a second "first visit".

It is one of the tragedies of cruising that the frissance of the first visit can never be repeated. It is that which drives us on to new destinations.

### **Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July: Sandaig to Rum**

This was a day when nothing worked out as planned, but we had some of the best sailing so far. Our plan was to go to Loch Scavaig, tucked under the Cuillins, with the fallback of going on to Canna if the downdrafts were too severe. The theory was that with a northerly forecast, the passage from the Point of Sleat to Loch Scavaig would be one tack, or even a fetch.



Scrambling on the Sandaig Isles

We weighed at 0820, and trickled out into the Sound of Sleat under main only while we had breakfast. Then, just after we had set the pole to run down to the Point of Sleat, the wind filled in from the NW and all had to be stowed away while we settled into a fast reach.



Approaching Point of Sleat





As we passed Armadale, the wind started to ease off, so thoughts of reefing before we rounded the Point of Sleat were set aside. Wrong! At 1115 we were round the point, and almost immediately put 4 rolls in the genoa and a reef in the main. The wind



Beating towards Loch Scavaig

shifted to NNE for a while, and it looked as though we would be able to lay straight in to Scavaig. But then the wind died away and we shook out all the reefs, and as we approached the Skye coast, the wind steadily freshened, so they had to be pulled back in again. It was becoming evident that the northerly wind was funnelling down from the mountains into Loch Scavaig. We went as far as the north end of Soay before abandoning our plan to go on in, with the wind gusting to 26kts, and still 4 miles to go.

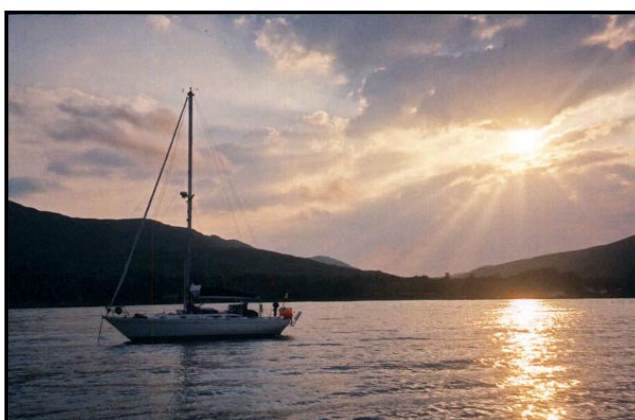
We turned away to go to Canna. Within 15 minutes the wind had died away to a gentle breeze, and it looked as if we had bottled out too soon. Still, we had made our decision; so on to Canna we decided to go. That was until we rounded the southern tip of Soay and a new sea breeze filled in from the South West, offering us a 12 mile beat! This was not part of the plan at all!



Loch Scresort, Rum



*Celtic Spirit*



Sam Brooke's picture of *Ariadne* at Rum



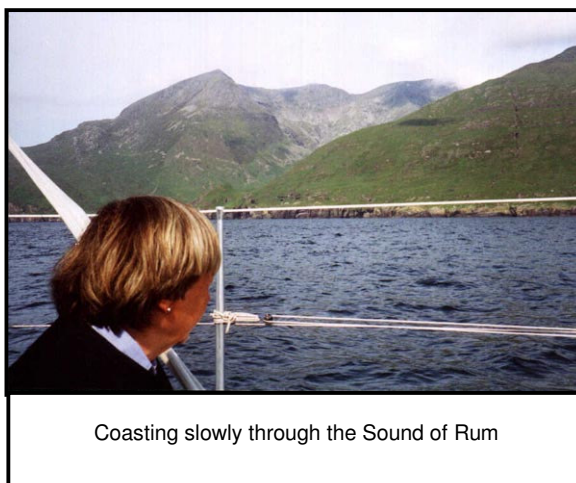
We freed off and decided to take a chance that Loch Scresort on Rum would be tenable, where we anchored in still conditions at 1600.

An hour later, *Celtic Spirit*, another Rustler, anchored 50 metres away. Sam Brooke and his two crew had been on passage to Iceland when Sam fell ill. They had got to St Kilda, and then returned via the Sound of Harris. We had a pleasant hour with them. The next day, they were going hill walking on Rum (some hills!). Obviously Sam was on the mend.

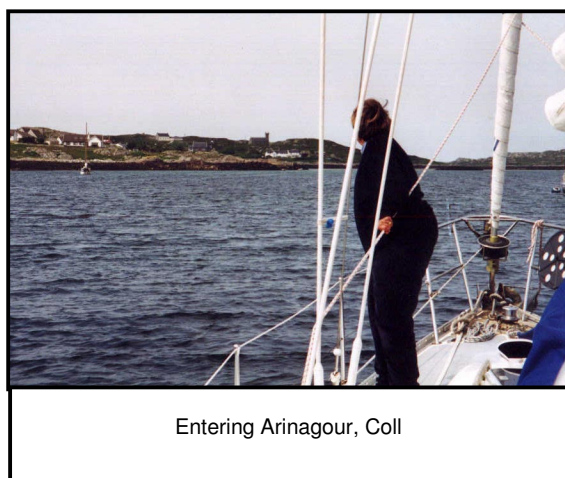
## Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July: Rum to Coll

We had a gentle night in Rum, with only a slight swell working in at times. The forecast was for the weather to worsen in 3 or 4 days, but in the meantime, the forecast was a settled N going NW 3/4. It was now Saturday, so we reckoned we wanted to back within the Sound of Mull no later than Monday. We therefore decided to run down to Coll, where the anchorage is best protected from NW-N-NE.

It was a gentle trickle, quite slow at first, then speeding up to 5kts on a broad reach when we could set the genoa. There was a slight cross swell running, which made it difficult for the sails to develop any drive, and a fore guy was rigged. Then the wind lightened so we put the pole in. It was not long, however, before it looked like a sea breeze would fill in, so the fore guy on the main boom and pole were stowed. We motored the next five miles till we were well under the lee of Coll and there was very little swell. By then a gentle sea breeze had filled in and it was a pleasant sail down to Coll coast to Arinagour, with the Treshnish Islands visible in the mist.



Coasting slowly through the Sound of Rum



Entering Arinagour, Coll

At 1445 we picked up an HIE buoy in Arinagour, and spent a lazy afternoon sitting in the sun or sleeping.

One of the crew of *Shemar* (with whom we had transited Crinan) had hinted that Coll was a good place for seafood, so the dinghy was prepared – by now I was beginning to get quite good at sorting this out, including mounting the outboard. We were on the outermost HIE buoy, so it was quite a long plod up the harbour past

about a dozen yachts, half on HIE buoys, half at anchor. I made a mental note that if I came here again, I would anchor closer to the top of the harbour.



As we secured the dinghy to the old stone pier, we were chatting to the owner of a beautifully maintained Laurent Giles Brittany class sloop. His father had had it built in the late 1940s, and he had cruised the NW coast since childhood, based in Northern Ireland. Even he continued to be amazed at the scope. After more than 25 years, he had been to two new anchorages during his present cruise. It also transpired that, while we had been running gently down from Rum, he had been storming along on a 2-reef fetch from Barra, and had felt overpowered. Instead of pointing up for Canna he had freed sheets and aimed for the heads of Coll. It is a salutary illustration of how localised conditions can be in this area. Obviously, Skye had been protecting the whole area of the Small Isles, as he had found the wind easing during his passage once he had passed Canna.

Main Street is a row of whitewashed cottages, probably all let as holiday homes. But at the end of Main Street, two have been converted into a cottage restaurant (which had opened only a week earlier). The First Port of Coll turned out to have an attractive simplicity, eager young staff, and beautifully prepared lobster and scallops at reasonable prices. Wine was offered on the menu at less than £8 for a bottle of Muscadet (for example), but it turned out that they had not yet received their licence, and couldn't sell us a bottle – which explained the BYOB sign outside the front door. Never mind, the food was good!

We found ourselves speculating on whether the venture could succeed. In France, a similar venture would be run by the entire family – effectively all contributing to a single family income. Here, it was clear that they were employing seasonal student staff. Perhaps it all depended on the level of Council Tax and any support from HIE (including the CalMac subsidy).

First Port of Coll deserves to succeed.



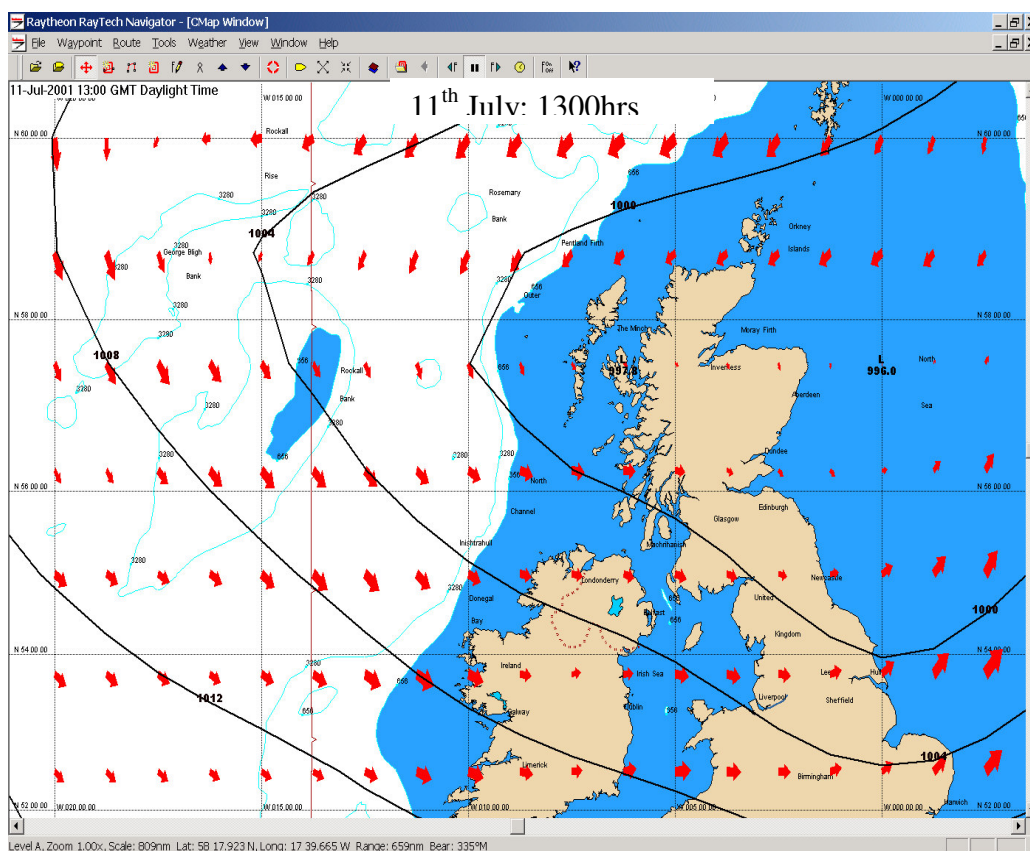




wire mould, then lined with fibreglass mat inside and out. She was an impressive ship of some 65ft. He reckoned he had now done it, and had switched to hang gliding! He was now hoping to sell her for about £60k, but acknowledged that a new owner would have a lot of expense including new sails. He had put down the mooring some years previously, and no one had bothered him or asked for any payment.

We swung too close to him, and re-anchored, right under the trees where we spent a peaceful evening. We had had three good sailing days in a row.

That evening we were able to get a weather map. We had been puzzled by the forecasts, which suggested a depression moving across the Hebrides, but generating gales in the Channel and Celtic Sea. We wanted to see what was going on. The chart below shows the forecast we obtained for the Wednesday when the worst of the weather was expected to be past.

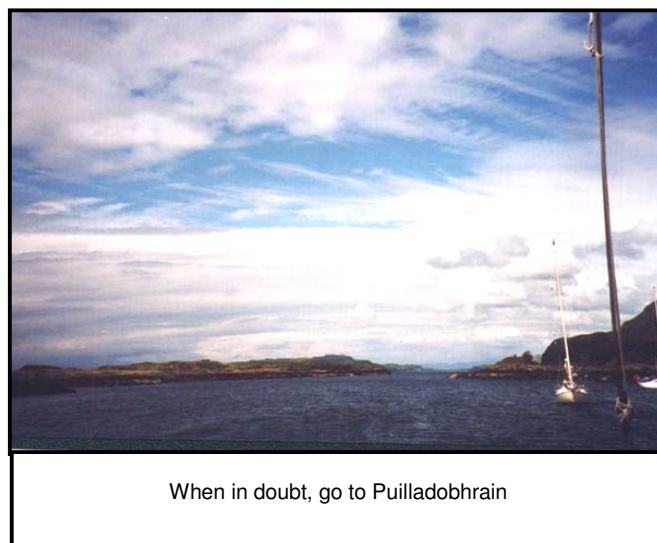


We began to understand why we would escape the strongest winds, but had to beware of possible strong NW winds at the end of the week. After considering a few options, we decided that we would go back to Puilladobhrain as it was close enough to Oban and would allow us to get there on Wednesday, even if there strong winds from SE to NW.

We had been sailing fairly hard for several days, a couple of days rest were needed.



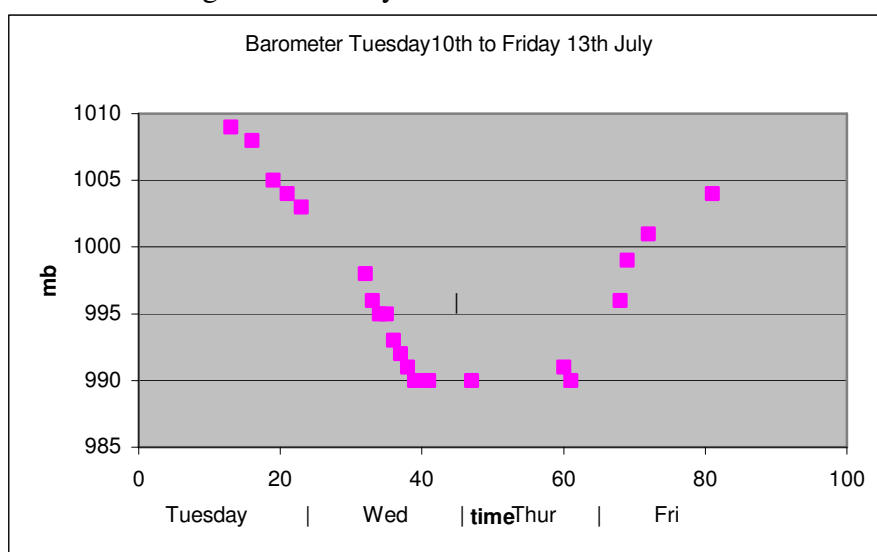
## Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July: Loch Aline to Puilladobhrain



The forecast was SW 3-4 becoming S4-5, showers then rain. We got away at 1030, but it took 30 minutes to slowly bring in the anchor chain and clean it off. Outside, we found that Mull had deflected the wind, so it was SE – on the nose. We motored all the way, arriving at Puilladobhrain by 1300, having had a 1½ kt tide with us as we came out into the Firth of Lorne, and passing between Bach Island and Dubh Sgeir.

As we arrived, there was one other Swedish Yacht in the haven, so were able to choose our spot, but by the end of the afternoon there would be a dozen more arrivals.

We had beaten the weather and were able to relax for the rest of the day while the great panorama of a major depression gathered overhead, initially sunny, with some gusts, then clouding over, with some showers. Then toward evening the wind died away, and the barometer started to drop. Weather is one of nature's great dramas, and we could see it unfolding before our eyes.



By evening, it was very grey, with increasing frequency of showers.





## Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> July: Puilladobhrain to Ardentrave, Oban Bay

The plan was to wait until the afternoon tide up through the Sound of Kerrera, or perhaps wait another night, unless the wind was going to go strongly into the North West. At about 1100, there was an unexpected gale warning for Malin, W8! We decided that, even though this was likely to be for south Malin, we had better get on our way, and 40 minutes later, we motored clear of the anchorage in pouring rain, and virtually no wind at all! Through Kerrera Sound, the rain lifted sufficiently for us to see some interesting crags, a rich green vegetation, with trees in little hollows.

By 1300 we were rafted outside an Irish yacht at Oban Yacht Services pontoon. This was really a day earlier than we wanted, but the threat of bad weather had led us to the decision. There was a very big depression going through, and we tracked the barometer over the next few days. The worst weather was to be to the south of us (or the extreme north), and we were so close to the centre that it never really blew terribly hard, although there were spells of rain and some quite strong gusts. It would have been quite unpleasant in the Firth of Lorne.

We now needed a few days to restock and regroup. First, we attempted to catch up on the washing, but the marina only had a couple of domestic machines and a small dryer. The metering was such that each load cost £2, so it was getting expensive, and the dryer was not really effective. It took all evening to make progress, and even then we had a large bag of wet clothing that we could not dry. It was decided to find a proper launderette in Oban the next day.

We had had a few emails and phone calls from Iain in New Zealand. He was obviously concerned about linking up with us in Oban and we tried to reassure him that it was simple. As Dairne said, “Oban is *just before* the back of beyond!”.

## Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> – Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> July: Oban<sup>8</sup>

Oban Yacht Services run a launch service from their pontoons at Kerrera to Oban every 2 hours, included in the marina charge. I had already discovered that they had a temporary launch on the run as their own was undergoing gearbox repairs. I asked the launchman what timetable he was running. He confirmed, with a wry smile, that it was the standard timetable, but as he was on his own and it was by now blowing fairly hard, it should be regarded as West Highland Time! I knew what he meant.

Armed with a bag of wet washing on the sack barrow, and an assortment of bags, we set off on the noon boat. The launderette did a service dry for us while we attacked Tesco for the first load of stores. The sack barrow and Dairne’s shopping trolley were essential kit.

The 1615 launch got us back just before the rain started – we had been lucky this time.

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<sup>8</sup> “Oban has been called ‘the Charing Cross of the Hebrides’, but surely this is a misnomer. It should rather be the Clapham Junction or Willesden Junction, of the Hebrides. It is not a terminus. No one stops here, at least not more than a few days. Everyone comes here to go somewhere else” – Frank Cowper *Sailing Tours*, Vol V



Hauling out *Dreamer* for inspection

As we got back I noticed *Dreamer*, a Marchwood boat alongside the fuel jetty. I hailed Jim, but discovered that he had left the boat there and was due to return in a week or two. More seriously though, we learned that she had gone adrift during the night. I spoke to the marina staff, including Mark Fishwick (who writes the West Country Pilot) who was working for the yard. Over the next two days, the story gradually emerged, and it appears to be as follows.

Two lads, probably drunk, had nicked a dinghy from Oban, rowed across and boarded *Dreamer*, probably a random choice. They had started to get her ready to sail, but had let go the mooring too soon, so she had blown ashore. They left her there, and escaped in the dinghy, but on the way boarded a fishing boat. Stupidly, they let the dinghy go, marooning themselves until picked up by the police later.

*Dreamer* was lucky. She probably went aground at 0200 just before low water on the only decent bit of shingle beach around. Almost anywhere else and she would have been against rock, and could have become a total loss. Even though it was windy she just edged inshore as the tide rose, until she was recovered by the yard at about 0900, apparently undamaged. They were going to lift her straight out, but a hydraulic pipe on the rig blew, so it was not until the next evening that she was hauled out. Inspection confirmed a few minor scratches to the keel, and no hull damage at all.



The invaluable barrow!

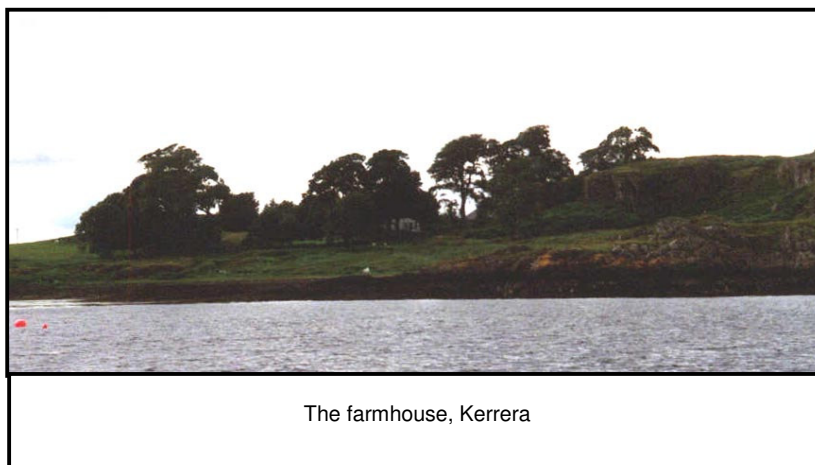
Meanwhile, it seemed one of the two lads had just emerged from jail, and was well known to the local constabulary. They admitted taking the dinghy, but were tight lipped about boarding *Dreamer*. However, *Dreamer's* wheel cover was found in the dinghy, so the circumstantial evidence was strong, and the police were hopeful of securing a conviction.

The whole thing could have made quite a good Parahandy episode!

I rang Jim and Mia and I think they found it comforting to know that there was a friend who could confirm what the yard and the police were telling them. They were due back there on 21<sup>st</sup> July for a cruise, then back home. Maybe our paths would cross.



The next day, we went for the heavy shopping – booze, vegetables etc. This was not so successful as we had overloaded the sack barrow. At a crucial point, one of the plastic clips failed, and the top bucket bag fell off. A few things spilled on to the pavement, and one bottle was broken. It was, of course, the whisky bottle! That will



The farmhouse, Kerrera

teach me to buy cheap whisky! Duck tape effected a repair, and we managed to get everything back to the ferry, and on board. We were now fully restocked – except for whisky.

Mia Yarrow had told us about the meals at the Kerrera farmhouse, so we booked, walked up the hill to a delightful old farmhouse with peacocks in the grounds. The meal was delightfully prepared, and thoroughly good value. We took our own wine. Definitely to be recommended. That evening we were the only guests.

Later, a call from Iain confirmed he and Clare had arrived in London. We just hoped they would bring better weather with them. On Friday morning, Iain rang again to say they had reached Glasgow and would be on the train arriving mid afternoon. We planned to go over to meet them, replace the broken whisky bottle and get one or two other minor items.

The weather was improving.

## **Taking Stock – end July**

As we rested prior to going back to Oban to join the Classic Malts Cruise, and pick up Iain and Clare, it was time to take stock.

We had completed the passage from the South Coast, been through Crinan Canal, and cruised the Inner Sound. That was cause for some satisfaction.

The boat had worked very well. We had yet to use the cursing chute, the trysail, and had not even had cause to dig out the heavy weather jib. But I could see how we would need them all under various circumstances, and it was comforting to know they were there. The only thing we felt was seriously missing was a deckwash pump to cope with Scottish mud and the depths. It is one thing to scrub 15 metres of chain at, say, Newtown; quite another to deal with 35-40 metres with soft mud. The seriousness of the situation was that the mud going into the chain locker was blocking the limber hole and the build up of water was making the cushions at the foot of our





bunk wet. We had been aware of the problem, but it had never been serious before. It needs a bigger diameter drain tube – but that is a winter job.

The weather had been tolerable on the way up, even though we had had a long spell motoring up the Irish Sea. The diversion into Troon had been for non-sailing reasons – namely the computer! The problems had been solved, and we had found the ability to send and receive emails, get weather maps, and phone our family had helped us to keep reasonably relaxed about things at home. Neil and Tamsin had been to our house, and checked our mail, and we had been able to examine our bank accounts on the internet, so we were sure of how we were getting on.

I had also been able to chase our pension advisers on email, as time was getting on, and I wanted to know I had some income in September!

Initially, the costs had been quite high, but that was partially due to weather and timidity in that we had been to quite a few marinas. We had intended to go through Crinan on the way back, so the costs would have been incurred anyway. It is not cheap, the passage fee being £108, and we paid Donald McTavish £50, and did not regret that fee. Two days at Ardfert had been expensive, but we were hiding from bad weather. Thereafter, buoy charges were rare, and on most evenings we were on our own anchor with no fee. We found that in some places, such as Portree, there was a charge for using HIE buoys, while in other places they were free. On the whole, we felt costs were broadly under control.

The boom gallows was a great success, and the autopilots had between them made it possible for this cruise to be tackled by just two people. Before we had left, Dairne had managed to get some Perspex hatch boards made. These were a real boon, especially when we lay tail to wind and there was a risk of rain. Other gadgets, such as the night viewer had been of occasional use, but a real bonus when they were needed. I still continued to get emails telling me my camera was still being repaired, so the loan of my sister Penny's camera had been much appreciated, and it had done sterling work. Could we afford to go on taking pictures at this rate?

After Crinan, the weather had not been kind, but we were pleasantly surprised that it was not cold, even when it was cloudy. We had rarely seen blue water, it mostly being steel grey under heavy low cloud. In the Inner Sound, we had not done much sailing, but had been to some fantastic anchorages. The scenery was mind blowing.

It had taken a time to come to terms with Scottish conditions. The range of choice of destinations was at first almost confusing, and the winds did not follow the forecasts in detail, being highly modified by the terrain. Slowly, one gets to understand these things, and confidence grows. We had done quite a lot more motoring than we had expected, but in part this was a reflection of the weather. The engine was due for an oil change before we got to Oban, where it could be done more easily. The motoring meant that battery management had been fairly easy, and it seems that provided we motor more than 10 miles every four or five days, it is easy to keep the batteries in good condition. Charging the computer and the phone while motoring meant that we could keep them both operational too. The fridge had been on continuously on its economy setting, and we were pleasantly surprised at how long things were lasting.



We had not reached the Summer Isles, but had we done so, we would have been there in dull, grey weather, and they are still there for the future. On our way south, we had had three very good days sailing from Sandaig back to Loch Aline.

In terms of information, the combination of the CCC and Imray pilot books was extremely useful. Coupled with the charts we had borrowed (some of the old fathom charts proving to be the most interesting) and the C-Map cartridges for the plotter (once I had discovered the detail layers!) we had always felt in full control. The list of favourite anchorages emailed to us by Mike and Rosemary Cubitt had been a most helpful guide, and was regularly referred to for help or to underwrite our own choices.

Because of the foot and mouth restrictions in Ireland we had not used the Irish Cruising Club pilot for the north and east coasts, but it was still in stock for the journey back! I had not used the sextant, and this was in part because I bought a computer version of the tables instead of the good old-fashioned ephemerides. Mistake!

A great success had been Hamish Haswell Smith's book, *Scottish Islands*. Quite apart from the fascinating information on geology and history, it provided often-unique information that helped pilotage decisions.

We had forgotten our Collins Bird Book, but this was eventually replaced at Plockton.

I was finding it all quite tiring, and Dairne was out-sleeping Sue! Attempts to do some 'proper work' had come to nothing, but I was even beginning to ask myself 'why I am here, and why am I doing this?' The answer was found in a delightful book that I had found in a gifte shoppe at Plockton. "Sea Change" by Mairi Hedderwick is a delightful account of a Hebridean cruise from E Coast Scotland through the Caledonian Canal in a Lymington Slipway 5 tonner called *Anassa* – not very different from *Fay-A*, our previous boat. Interestingly, they came through some of the locks with *Santana*, David Colquhoun's lovely sloop. During the cruise they went into Loch Nevis, and Mairi writes:

What is this need of mine for yet further isolation in a landscape that is intrinsically isolated anyway? In the past, this need became a passion that led to an obsession to own plots of land and houses positioned in the most splendid isolation. Ownership clinching not just earthly territory, but the view as far as the eye could see without tarnishing evidence of another human being. Always, in time, extensions were added on to possess yet another angle of the view when familiarity diluted its essence. Windows framed landscapes and seascapes as in an art gallery, priceless. Not for Sale. What envy all around! The site, no matter how unique, always became a trap.

*Anassa is showing me another way of possessing, transitory though it may be, yet with many more riches. The wilderness places will always be there. Waiting. Quite unmoved by the cycle of desertion, reclamation, desertion. The owners of the pristine cottages at the Kyles are, undoubtedly, as needful as me to tap in to this life balm that gives respite from the helter-skelter, hugger-mugger of most contemporary living*

*Thanks to Anassa, my 'possession' of the wilderness places is a moveable feast with no encumbrances of community charge, title deed or padlock. I was learning that the*



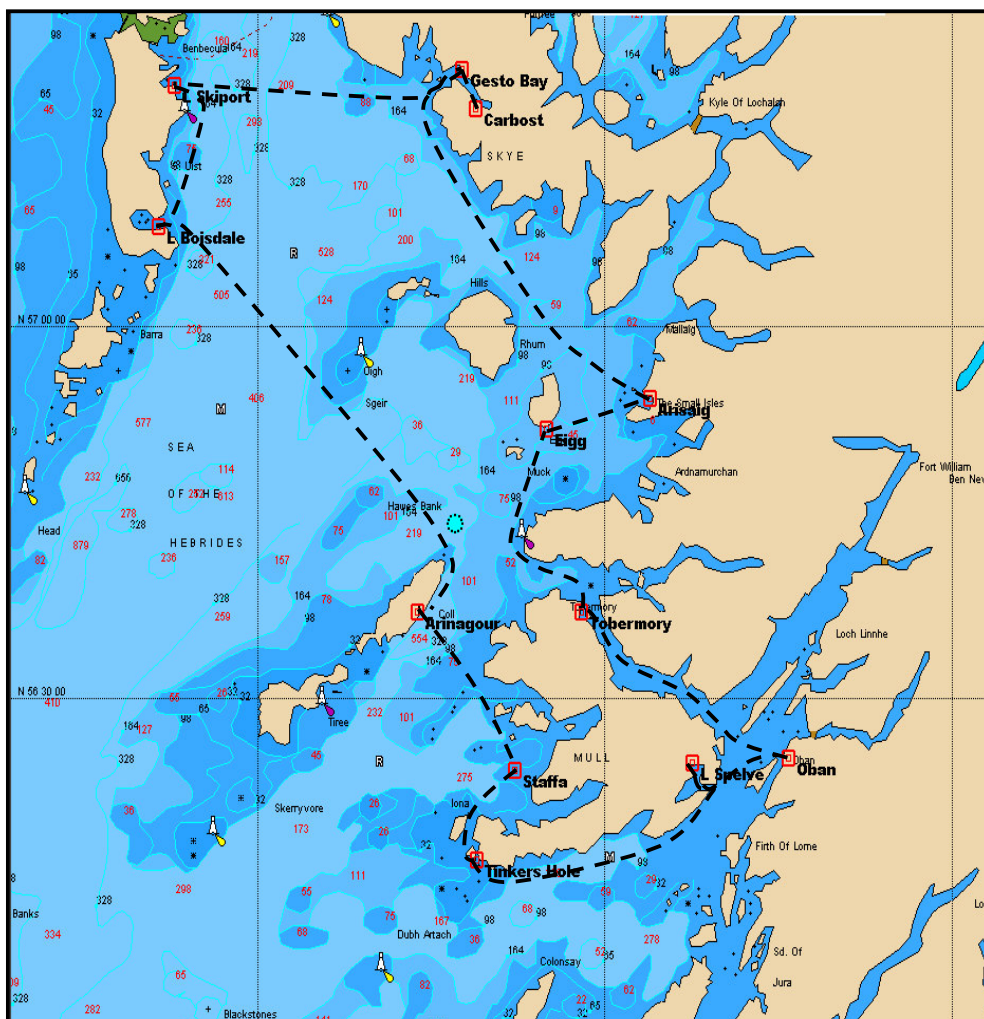
*title deeds of the soul are more rewarding than those of the land. Maybe I need never own property again. Imagine my distress at another yacht anchored at the head of the loch, walkers with backpacks on the Knoydart side, whelk gatherers on the shore! As though mocking, three tiny figures look down on us from the 3,410 ft peak of Sgurr na Ciche. Another boat comes up the loch looking for anchorage. I hold my title deeds close to my chest all night.*

We were then looking forward to a more social period with Iain and Clare on board, and the extra crew promised to make it easier to get to the outer islands, provided that the weather settled. As we sat in Puilladobhrain, the prospects did not look to good, as the big depression was heading straight for us. But perhaps, once it was through, we would see an improvement.





## *The Classic Malt Cruise*



**Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July: With Iain and Clare to Puilladobhrain**



Iain's 'pecs'!

Iain and Clare arrived by train at Oban just after midday. It did not take long to get them on board. Despite jet lag, they opted for a short sail to Puilladobhrain. It was a gentle reach, and we were anchored and exchanging news by 1855.

Iain and Clare have been sailing a 29er, an extremely light and fast skiff with an asymmetric spinnaker, and had decided to get fit. During the cruise they were to spend an hour every few days on the

exercises that had been prescribed for them by their personal trainer! Iain was quite keen to show off his pecs, but Clare was a little sceptical!



Iain and Clare had brought with them a set of New Zealand fleeces embroidered with “*Rustler 36 Ariadne*”. They were thick, warm and very smart.

Of course, they needed to catch up on sleep, but already they seemed impressed with the area.

### Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> July: The Oban Ceilidh

By 0900 we were under way, and soon beating up Kerrera Sound to Oban. We first went alongside a gaffer at Railway Quay so I could register us for the Classic Malts cruise. I arrived back at the boat with another armful of Classic Malts fleeces, caps and a Classic Malts house flag. We were going to stay warm!



Clare

After securing the boat back at Kerrera, we went for the free tour of the distillery and eventually on to the BBQ and entertainment in the distillery yard. The weather was kind. It was an impressive display of seafood, booze and whisky, which we enjoyed – although Iain and Clare were beginning to wilt through jet lag by 2100 when the event drew to a close we were led back to the quayside by a pipe band. We had met some interesting people, including the crew of *Cicero of Rhu*, who expressed interest in the *Rustler*, and with whom we were to have a sort of ‘race’ a few days later.

Considering it is all free, it was an impressive event. This year some 80 boats were registered, but not all of them made it to Oban.

### Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July: Oban to Tobermory



Concentration! Beating up Sound of Mull

Sound of Mull to Tobermory where we found a buoy. The weather was generally sunny, and it was a most enjoyable sail - a sparkling beat!

By 0915 we were refuelled and motoring in a light breeze. The wind filled in as we passed Lady Island, and Iain enjoyed a long, but gentle, beat all the way up the



Light refreshment





The mountains on Mull

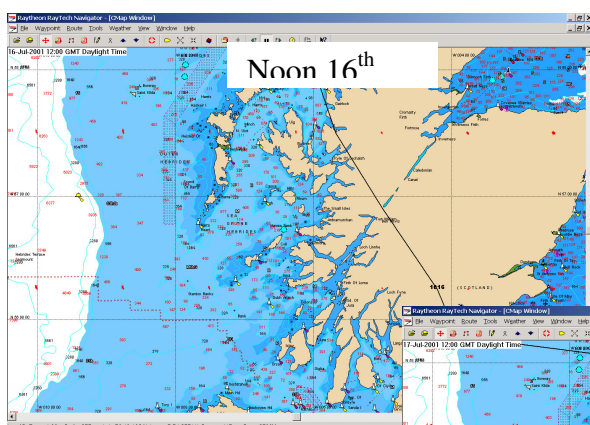
On the way we had caught and passed a Nic 35 and a couple of Beneteaus. Iain was satisfied that he had not lost his touch – there was certainly a more competitive atmosphere on board than in the previous weeks!

They were still jetlagged, so we just sat on the mooring and did not go ashore.



This time, it was a sunny evening in Tobermory

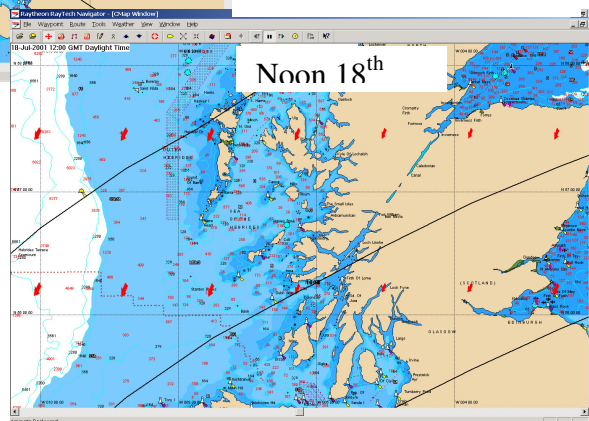
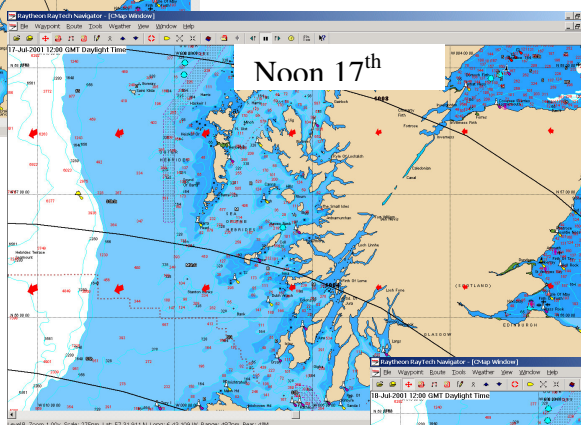
## Monday 16<sup>th</sup> July: Tobermory to Eigg and Arisaig



We had a few days before the fleet would assemble again at the Talisker distillery at Loch Harport. The weather pattern for the next three days from the Raytheon website was interesting, and we all discussed what to do to take the best advantage. My suggestion that we took advantage of the SSE lightish wind to go

to Arisaig so we could broad reach across to Skye when it went NE-N and freshened was accepted. We thought we would probably go to Canna on the way, but this would be flexible.

Departing at 0925, we motored round Ardnamurchan. This time, the air was clear and the panorama of the islands unfolded before us, with Rum, Eigg and Muck in the foreground, and the mountains of Skye forming a backdrop.







Iain and Clare had really brought some New Zealand weather with them!



Rounding Ardnamurchan - better weather this time"



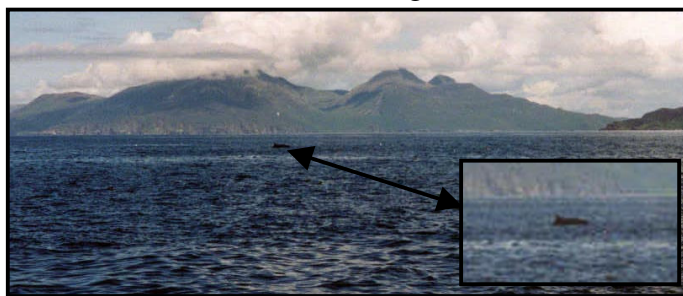
Concentration! Cursing chute deployed!

Initially it was gentle yachting in sunshine. Iain and Clare produced magnificent hats that would keep off southern ocean ultra violet, and rain as well! I really must have one of those hats!



All was going well, so we decided to insert a lunch stop at Eigg as the wind direction put Eigg right on our track.

Clare had accidentally renamed the cruising chute the "Cursing" chute, and the name has stuck. It was deployed by Iain, while Clare helmed, the way they work on their 29er in Auckland. It made a big difference



Whales close by

and we were bowling along until we were close to Eigg where we motored in to the harbour anchoring in about 4m of crystal clear water.

En route we had seen a pod of whales, possibly pilot or Minke whales, shepherding a school of fish. One blew

about 100 metres away. It was a first for all of us, and very exciting.



Approaching Eigg

In the afternoon, we tried the cursing chute again, but the wind failed and we motored, very very carefully, into the difficult Arisaig channel.

We saw Eigg harbour at its best, in sunshine and flat water, with a gentle breeze. It is not a place I would like to stay in if the weather was unsettled.

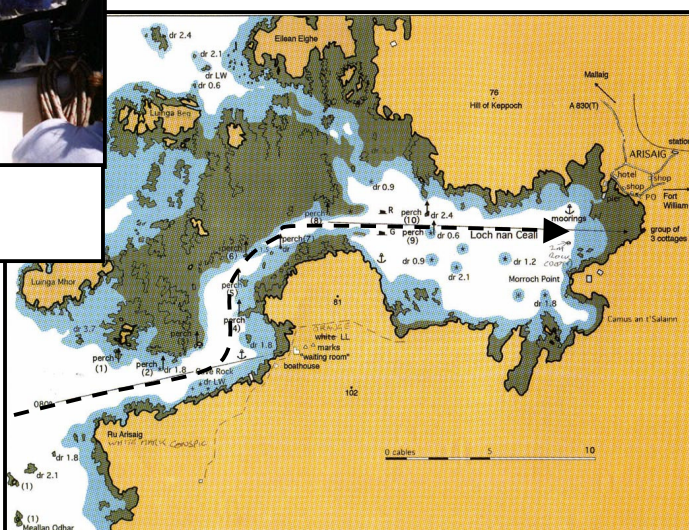


Eigg harbour

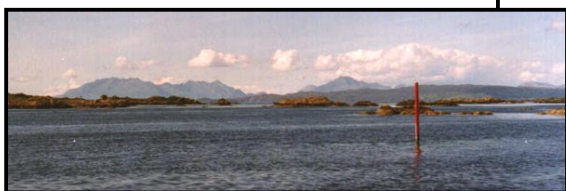


Heading towards Arisaig

It is an exquisite anchorage but the approach is quite daunting, although it has now been very well marked with perches.

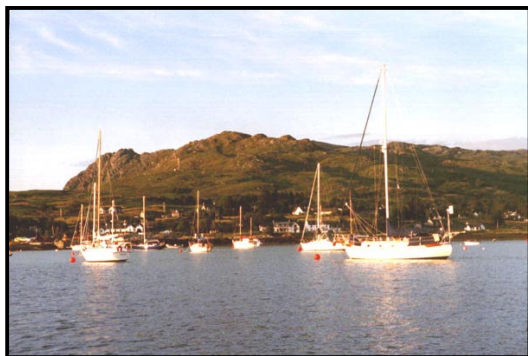


CCC pilot book entry for Arisaig!



View seawards from Arisaig channel





Arisaig

It had been a long day, and we were content to admire the view from on board. The evening, and the impending weather managed to produce a spectacular sunset.



Arisaig

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> –**

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> July: Arisaig to Gesto Bay, Loch Harport**

Our original plan had been to go to Canna, but the forecast for the following day was for strong Northerlies that would give us a hard beat to Loch Harport, so we decided to go there direct, and sit out the bad weather.

The anchor chain was incredibly muddy and it took nearly 30 minutes to get it aboard – we really need a deck wash pump!



Dairne and Iain failing to catch fish

By 1100 we were clear of the harbour, and running with the pole set in a gentle F2. This led to another failed attempt at fishing!

Gradually the breeze freshened, and we had a slight alarm when the control line for the monitor came un-spliced, but this was quickly repaired.

It became fast sailing with tremendous views of the Cuillins.



The Cuillins, Skye

By 1430, Iain decided to pull down 1 reef. After passing Loch Eynort, the wind became fluky as we closed the Skye coastline and met up again with *Cicero of Rhu*.



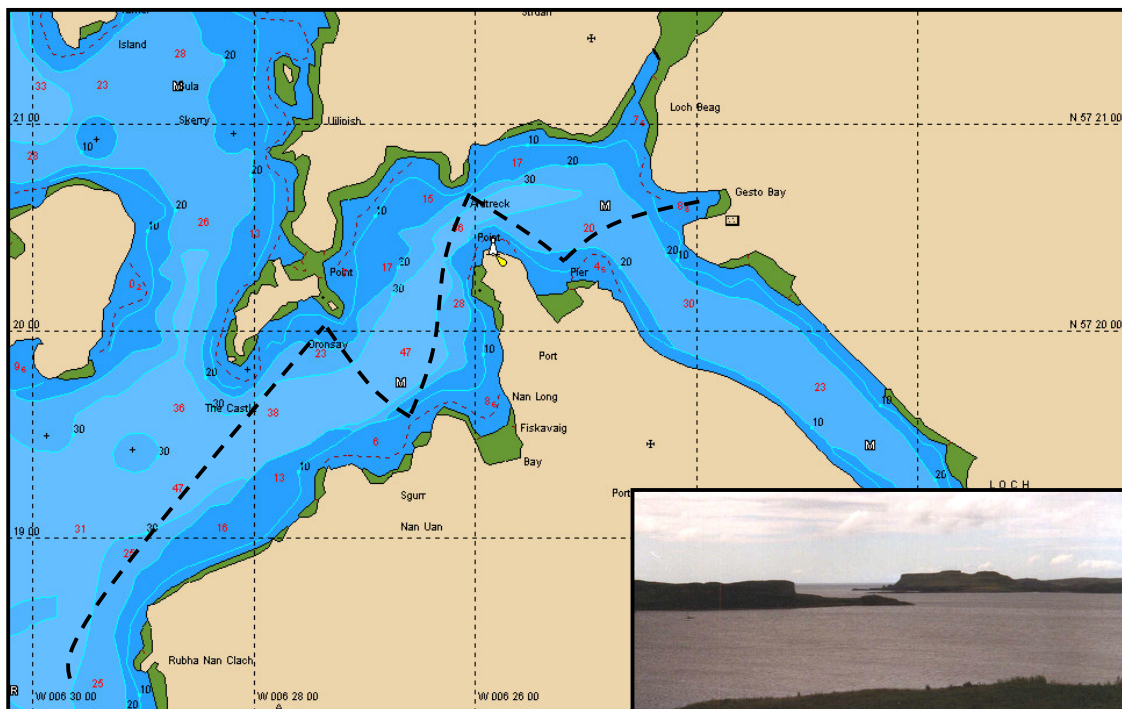


Chasing *Cicero of Rhu* into Loch Harport

Rounding the headland into Loch Harport, we were faced with a short, but brisk, beat. We still had 1 reef in, and were going better than *Cicero* in the stronger wind, but she would make up in the lulls and was pointing incredibly high. Iain and Clare tweaked everything to keep us in front until the last tack when we broke off early as we had decided to go into Gesto Bay for the night as it looked more sheltered than Carbost where the Talisker distillery is located and where the next Classic Malts meet was due 2 days later. *Cicero* gained incredibly on that last tack, and we had to concede defeat.



*Cicero of Rhu*



The route into Gesto Bay, Loch Harport, Skye



Looking out of Loch Harport



Gesto Bay was indeed sheltered, and very peaceful. The choice was a good one. We were to hear later that boats that had stayed in Canna for the night were to take a real dusting beating up to Skye, and the anchorage at Carbost was certainly much more exposed.

At the head of the loch, there was a ruined house, and some farm buildings. Trees ran down each side. Over a small ridge, we had a magnificent view of the Cuillins, the



Gesto Bay

big mountains on Skye that almost come to the head of Loch Harport.

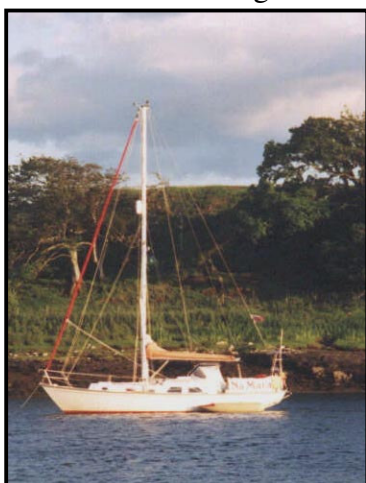
We were invited across to a motor sailer that was also part of the Classic Malts fleet, and we returned the compliment the next day. We just sat out a day of very strong winds and some rain. It eased a little in the afternoon, and Iain and I went for a walk, but Clare was still recovering from her cold, and Dairne was happy to hibernate from the fierce weather.



Clare doing her duty!

The result was that Iain and I just went to sleep after supper – it had been a vigorous walk! At least, that's our story! Clare had sufficiently recovered from her jet lag and a NZ cold to prepare supper. To be thoroughly recommended!

During the late afternoon and evening, a number of other boats arrived in the bay, obviously gathering for the Classic malts rally, but sharing our view that Carbost would not be particularly sheltered. One of them was *Na Mara*, the boat that had loaned us the mooring at Badacro. It was good to see them again.



*Na Mara*



The fleet gathering at Gesto Bay, Carbost and the Cuillins behind





## Thursday 19th July: Gesto Bay to Carbost

We were to hear later that those who had gone to Canna had a very dusty trip from there to Loch Harport but we now had a day to spare, so instead of going direct to Carbst, we decided to satisfy Iain's determination to fail to catch any fish, and to see if Clare could catch one. The buzz was that there were few fish about, but I thought there could be a chance off the headland.

At 0945, we weighed, and soon unrolled part of the genoa to run rapidly down to the entrance of Loch Harport where we hove to under bare poles with the helm lashed a-lee. Iain used Dairne's rod in about 35m of water, and almost immediately was reeling in as hard as he could. He had 5 mackerel! Clare was patiently using the hand line, which did not go so deep. Iain tried again and caught 4 more. Eventually Clare caught one. Within 20 minutes we had a dozen large fish, which was plenty.



The fishing ground - L Harport entrance (McCleods Maidens in the distance)



The first of many!



Five at once!

We motored back into the loch until we could bear away for the reach up Loch Harport to Carbst.

Carbst was far less sheltered than Gesto Bay, but we found a spot where there was reasonable holding and swinging room among the assembling Classic Malts fleet. Fresh mackerel were grilled for lunch, with the rest prepared and put in the cool box. Then a wet trip ashore in the dinghy for the distillery tour and some water.



Carbst - a bit of a lee shore





That evening, we were collected from the boat by a RIB, but the breeze and the chop were such that we had to use full heavy weather gear. That did not reduce the enjoyment of the evening's ceilidh. All drinks (including Scottish measures of malts) were £1 each. Pizzas and sausage rolls were served at 2300 hours.

If there is one thing that irritates me it is plinkity plonk Scottish dance bands. However, this band was outstanding. They did all the right things, announcing each dance, talking the participants through the moves, then maintaining a steady rhythm throughout the dance. But, once the dance had started, the music they played within the rhythm was terrific! It was almost modern jazz!

Iain and Clare took part in a few dances, while Dairne and I sat, watched, and above all listened. It was a terrific performance.

We went back to the boat at about 1100, but I sat in the cockpit listening to this band until they finally shut down at about 0100. I had already taken their details, which I passed on to my successor at ABP, Peter Barham, who in his spare time organises folk festivals. He was looking for a good ceilidh band, and I can guarantee that I found one of the best for him.

## Friday 20<sup>th</sup> July: Carbost to Gesto Bay

Iain and Clare went to the shops in the dinghy and did 2 water trips to increase our stocks.

Lunch was spent ashore at a BBQ at which the food was magnificent and the booze free. Iain also got involved in some of the shoreside events, especially the 'lobster hunt'. This was intended for children, but adults took part. The game was to row out in Avons to a yacht moored off with envelopes on the guardrails. Not more than three could be brought back at once. Iain did a couple of



The Talisker BBQ



Chief clown

trips and decided that it was all getting too serious.

He handed the oars over to the young lad he had in the dinghy in order to qualify. He then dived over the side, swam to a dinghy with three young girls in it, and stole their envelopes! Squeals and protests resulted – plus a lot of hilarity!

Of course he gave them back their envelopes, and at the prize giving he was



disqualified for piracy! More hilarity! Because he was a big kid he was also awarded a special prize of a bag of sweets and lollipops.

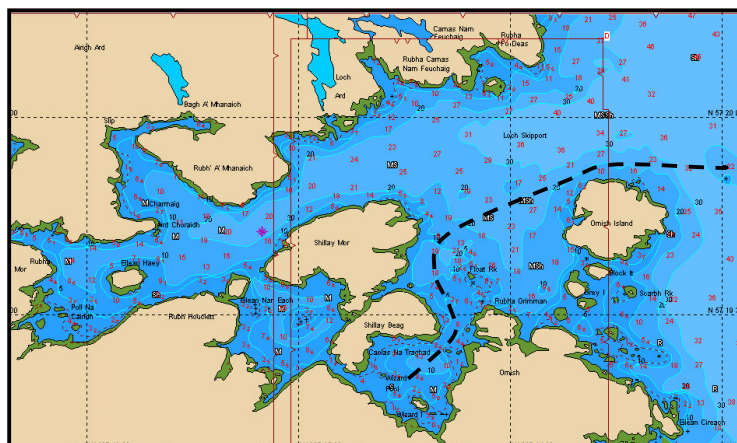
By the time all this had been finished, it was too late for a major passage, so we retired on board, got organized, and drifted gently back down the loch to Gesto Bay where we arrived at 1720, then settled into the World Canasta Championships.

## Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> July: Gesto Bay to Loch Skipport

Finally, we were going out to the Outer Hebrides. It was not a long trip, being about 30 miles, but it was, for us, a milestone.

At 0920, the anchor was weighed, and we motored clear of the loch, shutting down the motor just south of Oronsay. By 1015, the needle rocks called McCleod's Maidens were NNW, and the F4/5 SSE wind gave a fast reach.

At 1030, the famous phrase "It's looking brighter up ahead" was uttered, with the inevitable result that the weather went downhill from then onwards!



Wizard pool. Loch Skipport, S Uist

Halfway across the Minch, Iain said "Dad, have you noticed how a guillemot surfing down a wave looks awfully like a periscope?" – a reference to the fact that this area is heavily used by the navy!

By 1420, we had worked into Loch Skipport and into Wizard Pool where we

anchored – very much on our own. It was incredibly spectacular, and rightly felt miles from anywhere. Skipport is close under Hecla, one of the two mountains on South Uist, and it was throwing off a plume of cloud.

Iain was amazed at this anchorage, and I suspect that this alone justified the whole trip for him.

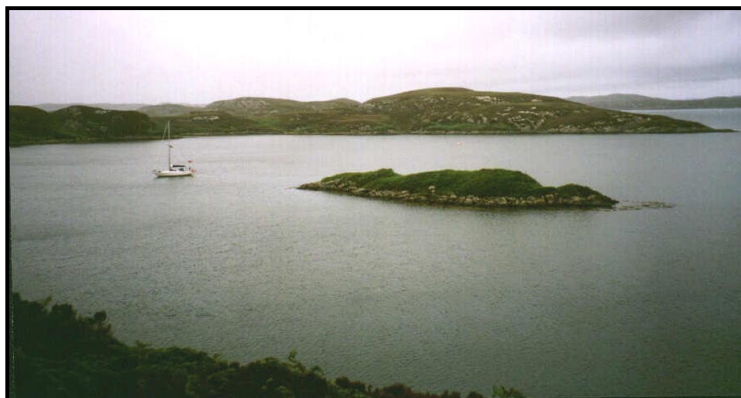
It was certainly a real Hebridean anchorage! The cloud was low, there was some rain, and it had a real feeling of menace – but at the same time it felt completely safe. This is the contrast that is the Hebridean atmosphere.



Entering Loch Skipport, S Uist



## Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> –Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> July: Loch Skipton to Loch Boisdale



Wizard Pool. Loch Skipton, S Uist

During the morning, Iain Clare and I went ashore for some very rough walking in the heather to see the sights. Unfortunately, it was raining, which detracts from the photos, but if anything added to the atmosphere of remoteness.

We had intended to go north from here, and round the top of Skye, but the forecasts were persistently indicating bad weather to the northern end of the Hebrides, and better weather further south, so we opted to go south instead. With a forecast of SW 3 /4 occasionally



Ashore on S Uist at Loch Skipton



Green, wet and beautiful.

5, it meant a beat to Loch Boisdale, the only saving grace being that we would be in relatively flat water.

The anchor was raised at 1130, and we worked our way out to the entrance, with a slight hiccup when Dairne misread the plotter. On the way out Iain saw an otter.

It was a hard beat, with reefs in and out on the way, but we eventually found an HIE buoy in Loch Boisdale at 1430.

The weather then went from bad to

worse, with heavy rain all day. But another Rustler arrived. Gary was sailing *Tamaray* back to N Ireland single handed, the owner having gone sick (another one?!). He came over in the dinghy for a drink... or two... or three..... As he arrived, the rain tipped down, but we then had three hours of glorious sunshine. We decided the Hebrides is a perverse place!





The next morning the weather was no better. We were running short of some essentials, and ideally needed a reserve gas cylinder. Iain and Clare volunteered to go ashore in the dinghy. Plans to move *Ariadne* closer to the landing point were abandoned, and the two set off in wind and rain.

On shore, they found the local shop had been closed, so caught the bus to the village three miles away. Essential stores were found, but the local stockist only had the large gas cylinders. By then, they had missed the bus back, but the locals said that this was not a problem as they could catch the post bus. For 50 p each they were loaded into the post bus, and were on their way back. On the way, the bus was hailed down by an old lady who gave the driver a few cabbages, and chatted away in the Gaelic. The bus then drove on. This is typical of the Uists, where barter is common. John Smith was not buried far enough to the West! The Chancellor doesn't get a look in! Well done, say I!

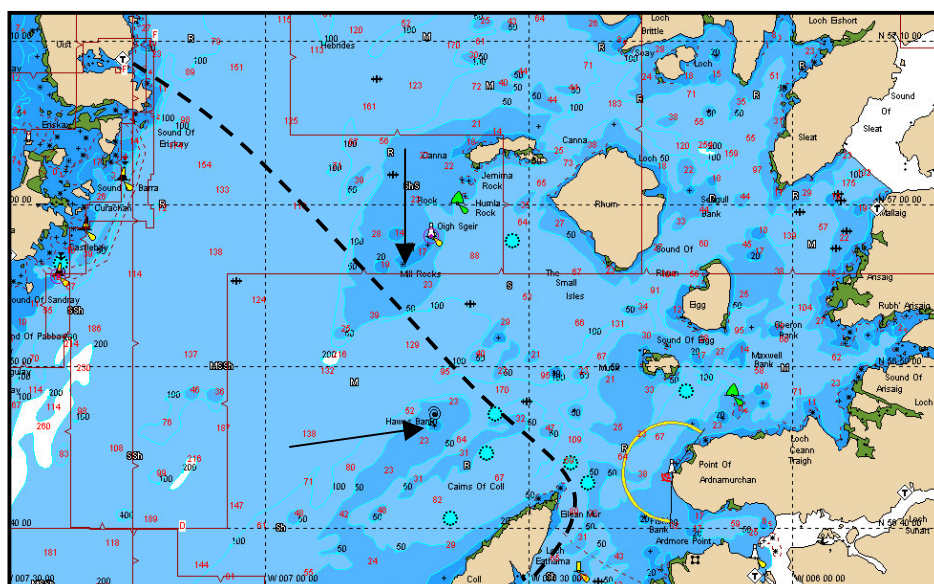


Intrepid shoppers! - *Tamaray* behind

By the time Iain and Clare got back on board, they were very wet, but had enjoyed the experience ashore.

The weather eased off, and Iain and Clare and I went over to *Tamaray* for a return visit. The weather looked to be improving.

## Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> July: Loch Boisdale to Arinagour, Coll

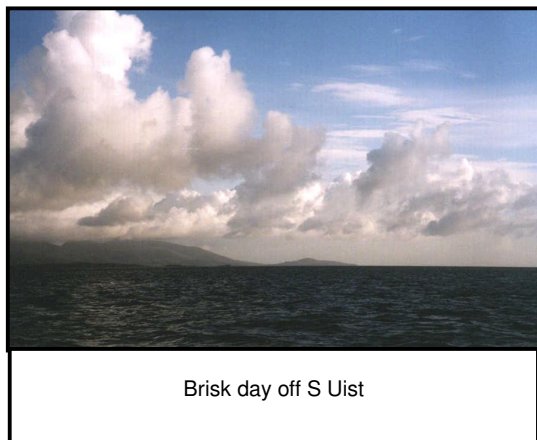


Loch Boisdale to Coll, between Mill Rocks and Hawes bank

The weather was still unsettled, and the risks of going down to Barra seemed too great. But a new idea was developing in my mind – although I did not yet float it



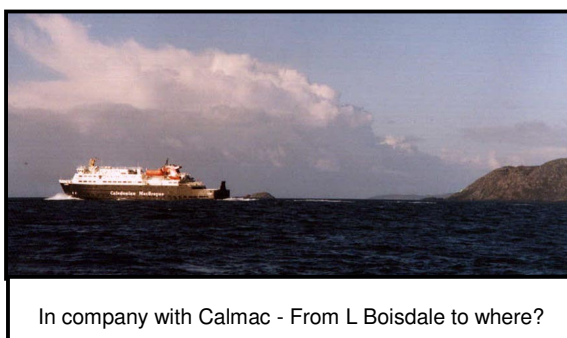
publicly. If we went to Coll, or even back to Sound of Mull, we could go round Mull the other way. I knew Clare's family had associations with Iona, so I had in mind that we might just be able to work the angles to go there. In this respect, the decision to go to Coll, fitted in well.



Brisk day off S Uist

*Tamaray* had left at 0630, and we departed at 0700. We were expecting a fast reach in steady conditions. On this basis, Dairne took her diuretics, but it turned out to be a bad decision. She has difficulty going forward in rough weather, and we were soon lurching around at high speed in increasing waves, possibly up to 2m. However, the sun shone for at least some of the time!

The trip developed quickly into a sleigh ride of a 40 mile reach, with one reef in the main and a couple of rolls in the jib (down 25%). Navigationally, the interesting aspect was getting far enough south of Hysgeir and the Mill rock, then making sure we stayed far enough north of the Hawes Bank. It was interesting how the Hawes Bank broke the swell, which increased again after we passed it.

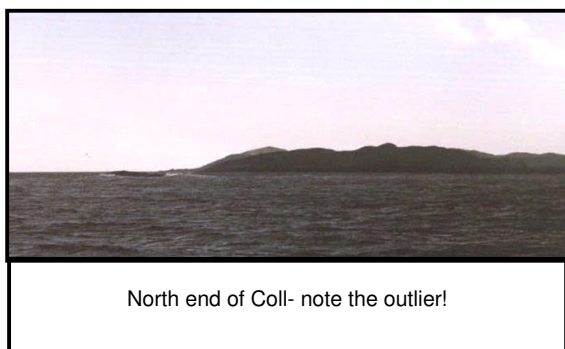


In company with Calmac - From L Boisdale to where?

Overall it was spectacular sailing, interesting pilotage – with tremendous views of Rum, Muck and the mainland coast. It was a terrific sail, and a pity that Dairne was not really able to fully enjoy it. The rest of us did.

The easy option would be to continue the reach all the way into the Sound of Mull, to Tobermory or Loch Drumbuie. But that would make my secret plan to go round Mull the other way more difficult. I was, however, slightly worried that there would be some swell at Arinagour. Fortunately we were sufficiently early that if Arinagour was untenable we still had time to go to Tobermory. Of course, nobody else knew this!

By 1345 we were hardening up round the heads of Coll, and taking in the second reef.



North end of Coll- note the outlier!

It was a tough beat, but with a pair of competent crew, it was relatively easy. However, we had not had the opportunity to bring the batteries up – the sailing had been too good! So 5 miles from Arinagour, we started the engine and butted into the waves. It would probably have been faster to sail .

As stated earlier, I was slightly concerned that the swell would work into Arinagour, but when we arrived, it was not too bad, so we went well in and anchored. We had half expected to see *Tamaray* there – I wonder where she went?



An hour later, we saw *Dreamer*, the Marchwood YC Starlight 35 coming into the harbour. We called them on VHF and arranged to meet them ashore.

There followed an excellent meal at the First Port of Coll restaurant, (which had by now got its licence) where Iain and Clare bought Dairne her second Lobster of the year, accompanied by 2 bottles of Muscadet at £8.50 per bottle. We ended up on *Dreamer*, consuming Jim Yarrow's malt and hearing the end game of his boat having been 'stolen' at Oban.

It was interesting that on the top of the tide, as we went out to the boats, there was an uncomfortable swell working into the harbour. This fits in well with Hamish Hamilton Smith's warnings – he clearly does not rate Coll very highly as an anchorage.

### Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> July: Coll to Tinkers Hole



Treshnish Isles



Staffa



My plan worked! The wind was SSW 3 and there was little swell. Visibility was far from wonderful, but adequate. We set off at 1050 and gently beat round the north end of the Treshnish Islands, not close enough to really see the wildlife, and down towards Staffa.

We were able to sail close round the East and South sides of Staffa, getting a very good view of the basalt columns, and of the large caves, including Fingal's cave. The swell was such that we were

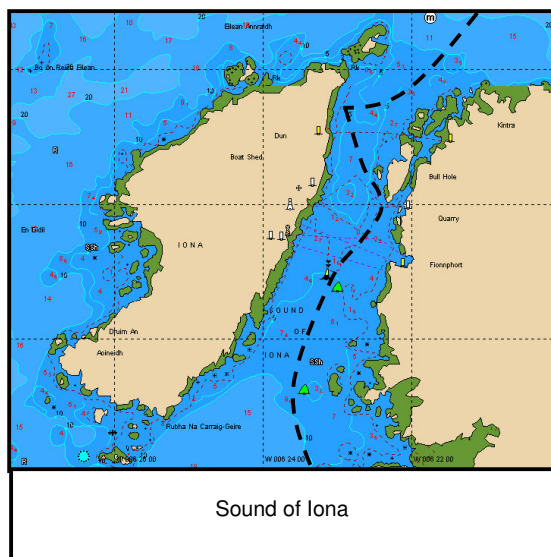
not tempted to anchor and go ashore, though.



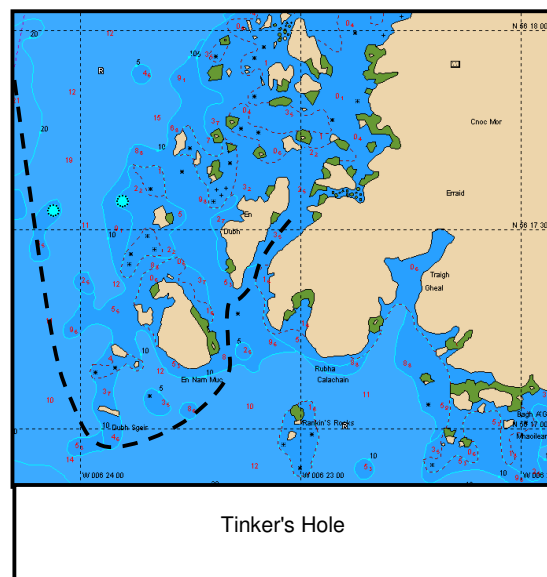
Then away towards the sound of Iona. By 1530, the wind had fallen light, so the engine went on. This had the perverse effect that we got to the Sound of Iona too soon for the tide, so we went into the Iona shore and anchored

in clear water for a couple of hours where we had afternoon tea!

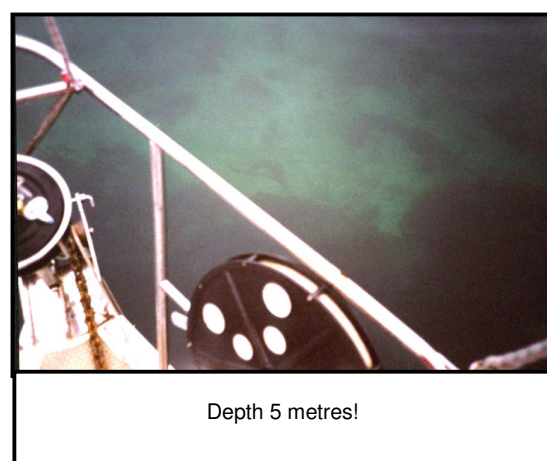




We found the swell disappearing just as we entered Tinkers Hole, a curious natural rock quarry at the end of the Ross of Mull. The approach is very interesting, with a rock awash right in the middle of the entrance. The cloud was low, and we did not see this spectacular anchorage at its best. With four other boats there already, it was tricky finding an anchorage with safe swinging area, but we managed. The visibility was so poor that we did not try to go ashore, a pleasure to be reserved for a future visit.



This is rightly recognised as one of the more amazing anchorages in this area.





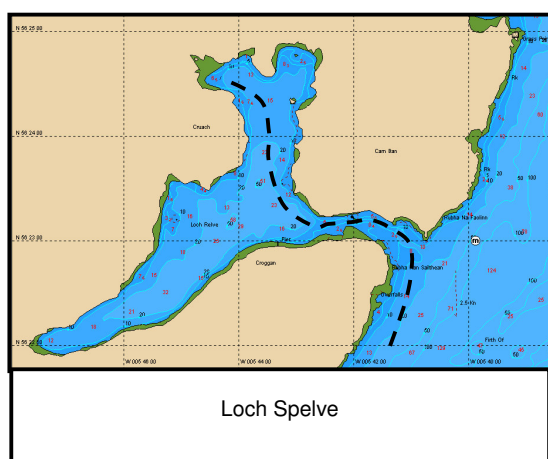
## Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July: Tinkers Hole to Loch Spelve

At 0700, the water was so clear that we could see the anchor chain on the bottom, and the anchor sitting embedded in clean sand. We got under way with the wind at under 5 kts, and very poor visibility. The track facility of the Autohelm was used to skirt the rocks inside the Torran Rocks, and we motored gently along the south coast of Mull while consuming melon followed by bacon sarnies.

By 0900, a light easterly allowed us to sail. Another gentle beat, but the Monitor did the hard work. This lasted for three hours before the wind faded and the engine went on again. The visibility lifted, we could see Scarba and Corryvreckan to starboard, and the Garvellach islands, but there were no safe anchorages there so we pushed on.



It was gentle, if slightly boring, motoring past the cliffs of south Mull. At one point, we saw an impressive valley with huge waterfalls, so we went in very close. It is called Port Namulce Buidhe.



Entering Loch Spelve is an interesting experience for the first time. The tide pours through, and there are serious shallow patches except very close to one shore.

We successfully negotiated the entrance, went round the headland and found our way to an anchorage in the NW corner, we were on our own, but later there were 12 boats in the anchorage!

There could not be a bigger contrast with Tinkers Hole. This was a rural setting, almost like Buttermere in the Lake District.



Loch Spelve - evening

olives, tomatoes and anything that happens to come within her reach! It looks and tastes far better than it sounds!

We settled down for our last evening and Clare produced a magnificent pasta splodge – one of her specialities, full of



NZ team effort

## 27<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> July: Loch Spelve to Oban



Loch Spelve - morning

The anchor was well dug in and needed motoring out. We were leaving fairly early to catch the tide in the Firth of Lorne. By 0930 we were clear of the loch, and up went the Cursing Chute again. There was a lot of mist about on the hills of Mull. There was an almost wistful, and slightly sad air on board as

we knew that this phase of our cruise was coming to an end, with Iain and Clare shortly heading back halfway round the world. That didn't stop them sailing the boat hard. In only 9kts of breeze, Clare helming with Iain trimming managed to get the boat speed up to 6kts, but most of time it was a gentle trickle until we turned into Oban round the north end of Kerrera.



Last sail with the Cursing Chute

Iain and Clare were dropped ashore at Railway pier for essential shopping while Dairne and I waited on an HIE buoy for an hour. A quick call on the handheld VHF





sent us back to pick them up, and we eventually made fast at Ardentrive marina on Kerrera on an empty berth.

The afternoon was spent sorting out and packing so that Iain and Clare would be ready to go across on the ferry next morning.

On the Saturday morning, we all went over to Oban on the ferry, checked the train times and hung about on the quay until it departed. Dairne and I then did the re-stocking in the supermarket and returned on board.



Iain and Clare - a great crew

We were sorry to see Iain and Clare depart. They had given the whole cruise a degree of pace and fun. The weather had not been too kind, but in two weeks we had had eight days of really good sailing, a couple of good parties, many fascinating anchorages, and we had only lost three days to bad weather. We had circumnavigated Mull, and been out to South Uist. All in all, a successful trip.

The only snag had been that my pension arrangements were taken a very long time to sort out. I was becoming so uneasy about it that it was affecting my enjoyment of the cruise. I decided that I

had to go back to Southampton to sort things out, leaving Dairne with the boat at Ardentrive. It was irritating that it looked like a decent patch of weather, but that could not be helped.



## *Interlude*

### **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July: Graham to Southampton**

We had made friends with Rob and Dolores, who had sailed their boat, *Rolling Stone*, from San Francisco, through Panama, around the Gulf of Mexico and across the Atlantic in 2000 to Scotland. They had left the boat in Scotland over the winter and had planned to sail up to Shetland and over to Norway. The persistent bad weather and predominant northerlies had led them to abandon the attempt at Loch Gairloch – coincidentally our furthest port north too.



Rob had worked a lot with Scanmar who produce the Monitor windvane, and still does the odd day or two for them when it is mutually convenient. His comments were useful and interesting.



He had also fitted two quite small rigid solar panels in a manner that allowed them to be adjusted easily. He reckoned that on a good day, they could produce 5 amps. Seeing his installation has certainly changed my ideas.

Rob and Dolores were disappointed at their change of plans, and had thought to compensate with a visit London, something they had never done, but they were rather put off by the cost of hotels (not surprisingly). I suggested they should consider joining the Cruising Association and using their cabins at Limehouse at £25 per head. While they are very basic, the CA is located within easy reach of the centre of London. Rob was also fascinated by the library and I think it was also encouraging that there would be some like minded people to meet in the evenings. We rang the CA who were very helpful, and it was all set up. Maybe we will find out one day how they got on, as we were to leave Oban before they returned.<sup>9</sup>

We were chatting about these things before I caught the 1200hrs ferry to make the 1240 train. Then the marina asked me to move! With help from Rod and Dolores we went against the pontoon with *Rolling Stone* outside. This made life easy for Dairne while I was away., and the arrangement was such that we would not collect a raft of boats outside us during the West Highland Week – the fleet was due to arrive that afternoon!

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<sup>9</sup> We received an email on August 14th saying they had had a great time, and thoroughly enjoyed the CA.



We just made it before the ferry left! So I caught the train.

I was attempting the impossible. Travelling by Virgin trains and on a Sunday! In the event, all the trains ran on time, and all the connections (at Reading and Basingstoke) worked! I arrived at Southampton Central at midnight thirty on Monday morning, and took a taxi home.

## **Monday 30<sup>th</sup> July – Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> August: Southampton**

### **Graham**

The south of England had been enjoying a heatwave, and it was very warm compared to Scotland. My first luxury was a long soak in a bath.

As Iain and Clare had already been to the house and borrowed our car, I was dependent on Betty (Dairne's mother) for transport. A quick trip round town meant I got the spares for the baggage barrow that had been broken by overloading, but decided that a temporary deckwash pump was not possible. I also collected my camera, so Penny could have back the one she had loaned to me. I was also able to get some additional dressings for Dairne, although that took two visits to the surgery, and two visits to the chemists. Betty also took me for a brief surprise visit to my parents. They did not mention the fact that Iain and Clare had visited them the previous day. Rather sad.



Highwater in the heat (Wendy & Perryn)

On the Monday and the Wednesday, I met with the financial advisers, and made some key decisions regarding pension, so hopefully all will now be well. Now I at least understood the process and the timetable. It looked as though I would have to come back again in the week commencing the 26<sup>th</sup> August. But peace of mind was restored. I had also had the opportunity to talk things through with John Miller who, as an accountant, offered some very objective views.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> August, I confidently boarded the Virgin train at 0940. It was an old 125, with only one locomotive running. Signal problems at Didcot meant I missed the connection at Birmingham. The next Glasgow train would not link with the service to Oban. While waiting for the train in Birmingham, the cold that had been threatening to overtake me for some time really broke out. Virgin promptly provided vouchers for some lunch, and another for a taxi from Glasgow to Oban! And it all worked, getting me back to Oban just in time to catch the last ferry back to Ardentrive.





## Dairne

As soon as Graham left at midday, I was invited aboard *Rolling Stone* for a cup of tea, which lasted until 1845! As the West Highland Week fleet had arrived I decided to go ashore to take a photo of the very full pontoon berths so Graham could see what it was like whilst he was away!



West Highland Week fleet at Oban Yacht Services

I met a lady (Anne Baird) exercising her dog and who had been on the *Rustler 36* at the last Southampton Boat Show and stated it was her dreamboat. A little later she invited me for a drink on *Mingara*, a Twister, which belonged to friends Rosemary and Tony Irwin. Her husband Ken asked some pertinent questions about the *Rustler*. Well, that was the rest of Sunday sorted.

Monday was spent cleaning the boat and returning everyone's hospitality.

Tuesday was spent doing the washing, which took most of the day at Ardentrive – there were other people to consider and the coins got jammed in the meter for the drier! It was a good drying day, sunny and windy, so the boat looked like a Chinese laundry. It was a good job that Graham was at the other end of the country!

I went over to Oban on Wednesday to pick up some photos and couldn't resist buying a kilt for Kendra and a tie for Christopher. I had resisted the temptation until then but Graham really shouldn't have left me with access to shops and money! The fleet had left for Tobermory and Rob and Dolores had left for London.

Thursday was a non-day spent on board fielding the odd phone-call from Graham keeping me up to-date with his journey.

## Planning the next phase

During the previous two weeks, we had been in telephone contact with Mike and Rosemary Cubitt. Mention has already been made of their helpful harbour notes. They had also rung Dairne while I was in the south. Their cruise was not going too well. They had been as far up as Plockton where the weather had been quite severe for a day or so, and had decided to start working south again. We spoke to them on the



evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> August to find they were in Tobermory, and intending to move down the Sound of Mull.

As we had not seen them for some years, the idea of linking up seemed well worthwhile. Loch Aline or Loch Spelve seemed good targets, and it was left that Mike would ring to say which he was aiming for the following day.

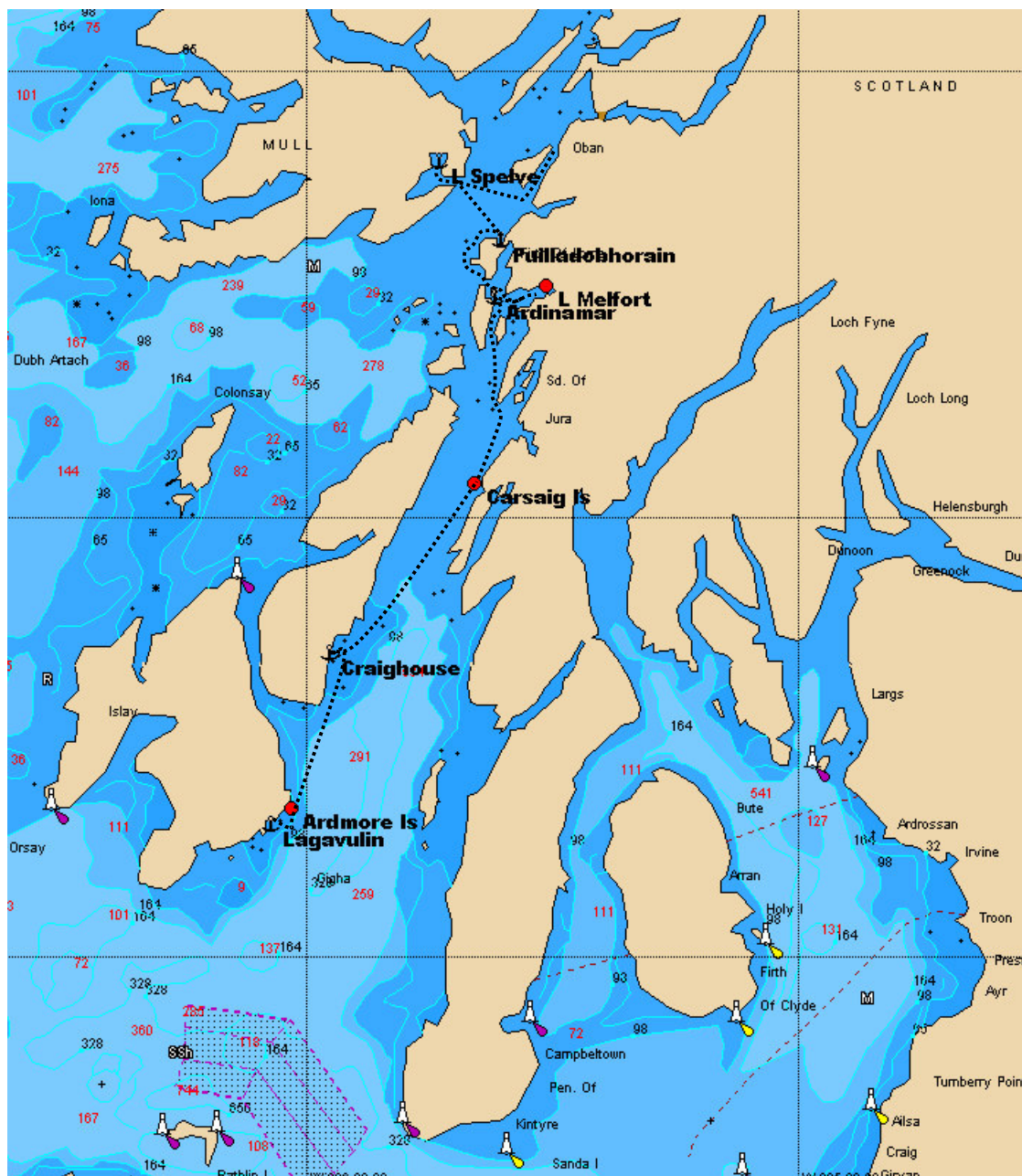
They were cruising in their She 31 *Isha* with their eldest son, Alasdair, who is severely disabled. We knew that they had devoted much love and care to Alasdair, and also brought up their second son, Malcolm, who now has qualified and is living in Ireland. Mike had spent his career in shipbuilding, much of it at the major rig building yard at Nigg near Inverness. Now he has taken severance, but Rosemary will still be teaching for a couple of years.

Mike, Rosemary and I had all been at Newcastle University, and had remained in contact throughout, but had only rarely met over the years. We had a lot of notes to compare!



## *Cruise in Company*

### Friday 3rd August: Ardantrive to Loch Spelve



During the late morning Mike and Rosemary rang the say they were going to Loch Spelve. That suited us well, but we had some essential shopping to do, mainly getting boxes of tissues, and other potions to deal with our colds and other ailments.

By 1550, we were away from the pontoons, and motoring down the Sound of Kerrera. This was a cop out, but neither of us was feeling particularly bright. It enabled us to round the south end of Kerrera then set the genoa to fetch across to Loch Spelve.





Kerrera Sound is a quite attractive, but relatively busy, waterway

We had already been to Loch Spelve, so the entrance posed no real difficulties, except that I lost a flag halyard, and spent most of the time motoring in trying to retrieve it – eventually with some success.

As we approached *Isha* we had all the flags flying – burgee, Scottish courtesy, CA house flag, our own ‘Rabbitts’ flag and the Classic Malts banner! To make life easier, we went alongside Mike and Rosemary’s boat, but later dropped away onto our own anchor. This meant we could cross easily, and they, including Alasdair, could come on board *Ariadne*.

It was an evening where the gossip of years was exchanged! Alasdair was extraordinary. He is very severely disabled, but clearly likes company, welcomes attention and is very rewarding in his



*Isha* - Mike, Rosemary and Alasdair



Mike, Alasdair and Rosemary

reactions. But what a task to have to live with him and help him all the time! We felt nothing but admiration for Mike and Rosemary who just accepted that this was their task, and the bonds of affection were plain to see. It was actually quite moving.

## Saturday 4th August: Loch Spelve to Puilladobhrain

Mike and Rosemary needed some essential shopping, so they left early to go to Oban. We agreed to meet again at Puilladobhrain. We just hung around till after lunch, but got a shock just as we were due to leave. The loo inlet was blocked. After dismantling

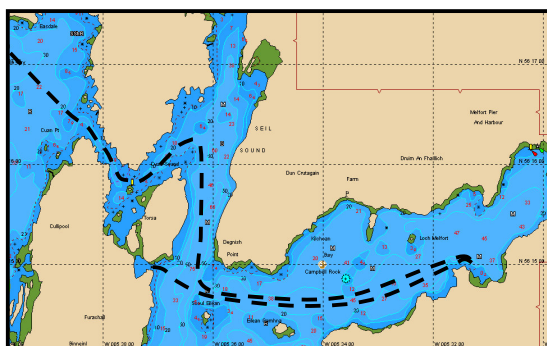


the pump, it was eventually established that the seacock was blocked. We concluded this was probably one of the millions of jellyfish that were all round us – an assumption that was proved correct as the blockage cleared as soon as we started to move.

It was a gentle afternoon sail to Puilladobhain, where we found a clear space to anchor, Mike and Rosemary came alongside and the socialising continued. We could not get over Alasdair and his interest in what was going on. Our hearts went out to him.

## Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> August: Puilladobhain to Ardinamir

Mike and Rosemary wanted to go on to Ardfert to get water showers and so on, but we had had enough of marinas. We agreed to try and meet up later.



Through Cuan Sound to Kames Bay, then back to Ardinamir

Luing. Halfway through we had to use some engine help, but the passage was safely completed.

An hour after they had left, we weighed and motored out to find a gentle southerly breeze, giving us a beat down the coast towards Easdale. Rounding the southern tip of the rocks off Easdale we headed in to Cuan Sound. This is a winding passage between Seil and



Approaching Cuan Sound



Swirling tide in Cuan Sound

By now, there was insufficient water to get into Ardinamir, so we ran up Loch Melfort until we found an empty buoy in Kames Bay, nicely sheltered behind a small peninsular, for lunch.



It was late afternoon when we motored out of the loch and reached gently across Seil Sound to Ardinamir. This haven is a slight widening of the passage between Cuan



Ardinamir - note the CCC perches, and the rock on the left (usually covered)

Sound, Luing and a small island NE of Luing. It has a narrow, shallow entrance, although it is now well marked by perches placed there by Clyde Cruising Club. Apparently it was very popular until Craobh Haven marina opened – which only goes to show the value of marinas; other people go there leaving nice places like Ardinamir for people who are prepared to take the trouble to find them.

Once inside, it took some time to find a comfortable spot among the half dozen boats already there, but it was worth the effort, and G&Ts in the sunshine rounded off an interesting day.



Ardinamir - looking through the gap into Cuan Sound

That evening, as the tide fell, the water gushed through the gap between Ardinamir and Cuan Sound, but it was too dark to photograph properly. Even in this picture, there is quite a stream evident.

### **Monday 6<sup>th</sup> –Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> August: Ardinamir to Craighouse**

For once the anchor came up clean at 0840, so we just motored out using the CCC posts as guides. There was no wind, so gently down the Shuna sound, picking up the strengthening tide, then taking the inside passage at Dorus Mor.



One of the anchorages at Carsaig



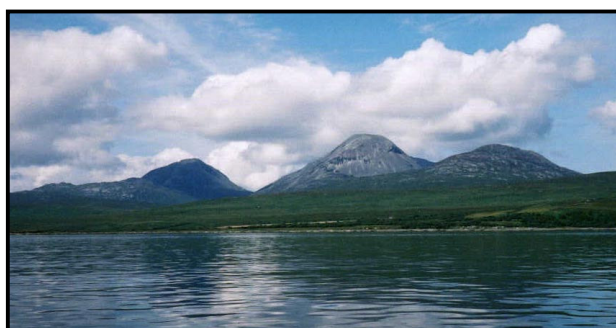


We had a vague plan to go into Crinan and see if we could link up with Mike and Rosemary, but soon altered this to a visit to Carsaig, which looked like an interesting anchorage. Just after we passed Crinan, Mike phoned to say they were going to try for Craighouse on Jura.

All this area was new to us because we had come through Crinan on the way up. On the basis that we had found their recommendations excellent so far, we decided to join them – but nosed into Carsaig on the way as we were at least an hour ahead. It is a fascinating set of anchorages, with shelter somewhere from any wind direction – a piece of knowledge that could prove very useful in future years.

Across the Sound of Jura, we could see boats pelting down the coast on the outfall, from Corryvreckan, and even on the mainland coast we were to experience some fierce swirls of tide where the water from Corryvreckan just smashed into the south going tide in the Sound of Jura. It must be really fascinating in heavy weather!

Jura is a wild landscape, dominated by three mountains – the Paps of Jura. They are bleak grey peaks with massive scree on all sides.



The Paps of Jura

In pilotage terms, this wide sound is surprising because, in the middle there is a shallow patch. Our track took us clear of it, but the Skerivale Tower is a significant pilotage feature.



Craighouse

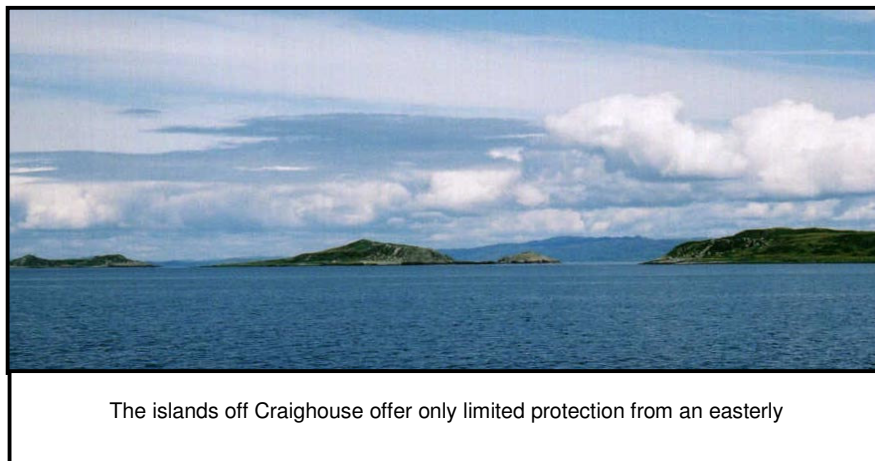
At 1320, we rounded into Craighouse and found an HIE buoy. The water was so clear that with 5m under the keel we could see every link of the groundchain, the water being glassy calm.

*Isha* called to say she was 9M away, and duly arrived two hours later. At my suggestion, they took their own buoy as this did not look like a place where we would want to raft up overnight, especially with there being the possibility of the wind going easterly overnight. It turned out to be a wise decision as the buoys were all full in less than two hours (mainly boats from the Clyde starting their cruise), and there was to be quite a chop in the harbour the next morning.



At Rosemary's suggestion, we all went to the hotel for an excellent pub meal. Alasdair clearly enjoyed the adventure, and we rounded things off with a nightcap on board *Isha*.

The next morning was grey, with rain and a light easterly bringing in an unpleasant loup. On the radio, Mike said that they had decided that enough was enough, and they would now turn north. We decided to sit it out, and waved them on their way.



The islands off Craighouse offer only limited protection from an easterly

We had planned to go through the Sound of Islay to West Loch Tarbert on Jura, but the cloud was so low, and there was so much rain that we abandoned the idea – with some reluctance. But the views would have been limited, and I did not want to get trapped in the loch if the weather deteriorated.



Girl Jane from Norway

We made up for the disappointment by inviting Robert over from *Girl Jane*, a Norwegian flag cutter. He left his daughter behind, but spent a couple of hours chatting. He was on an extended voyage from Norway, with the vague idea of overwintering in Ireland and maybe going on to Spain. He was thinking of going to Portpatrick, but was worried about the entrance in westerlies. I was already thinking of going south too, and suggested Bangor near Belfast as a better alternative. First, however, we wanted to visit Islay.

During the day, the wind shifted and the irritating swell subsided, as forecast.

### **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> August: Craighouse to Lagavulin, Islay**

My 60th birthday! The rough gameplan was to potter for a couple of days round south Islay before heading off across St Georges Channel.

Careful study of the pilot books, and the settled weather, suggested that we could go inside the Ardmore islands, a small group of rocks off SE Islay reputed to be teeming with wildlife, and offering some interesting, but tight, pilotage.





Entering the narrow channel through the Ardmore Islands

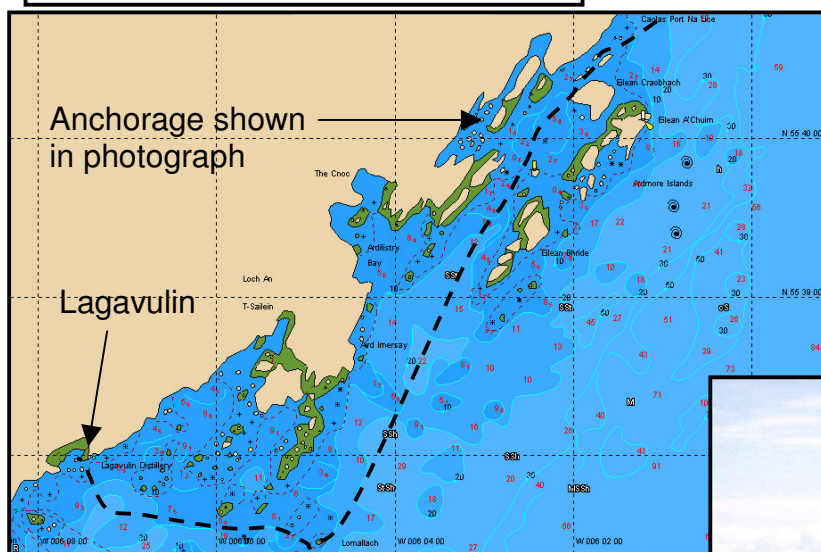
Under way at 0900 with NE 4 wind, the jib was poled out as we ran in warm sunshine across the Sound of Islay towards Ardmore Point. The wind dropped as we approached, and all sail was lowered as we did not want to be running with the tide through a tight rocky channel. The pilotage was very interesting some parts of the channel being only 50 metres wide, and there were some shallow patches to negotiate as well.



Cosy anchorage in the Ardmore Islands

It was tempting to stay in one of the anchorages, but the thought was that we could come back the following day. Also, there was another boat tucked into the best one behind some rocks. There were groups of seals blinking at us, and many seabirds. It is a beautiful spot, but could be real trap in bad weather.

We went on round the Iomallach rock

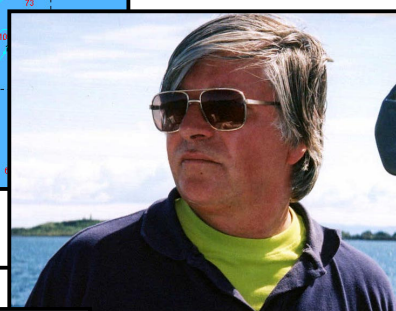


Anchorage shown  
in photograph

Lagavulin

The passage through the Ardmore islands to Lagavulin Bay

before lining up to go into the tiny natural harbour at Lagavulin. It is a difficult approach between two rocks, then a short twisting channel marked by a couple of perches.



Concentration!



Approaching Lagavulin

There is not much depth to spare.





Eventually we picked up a visitors buoy.

The dinghy was launched and we rowed ashore, but had missed the distillery tour. Never mind! We purchased a bottle of Lagavulin (Dairne's favourite) to ship home, and a bottle of Oban as a birthday present for immediate consumption.



It was difficult to imagine the Classic Malts fleet fitting into this little harbour. Apparently, they had managed 34 boats in the harbour, with the rest going to Port Ellen round the corner.

The afternoon was spent enjoying the scenery, and a little Oban water. After supper, we tried an evil dice game that Neil and Tamsin had sent as a birthday present. Takes some getting used to!

### **Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> August: Lagavulin to Bangor, NI.**

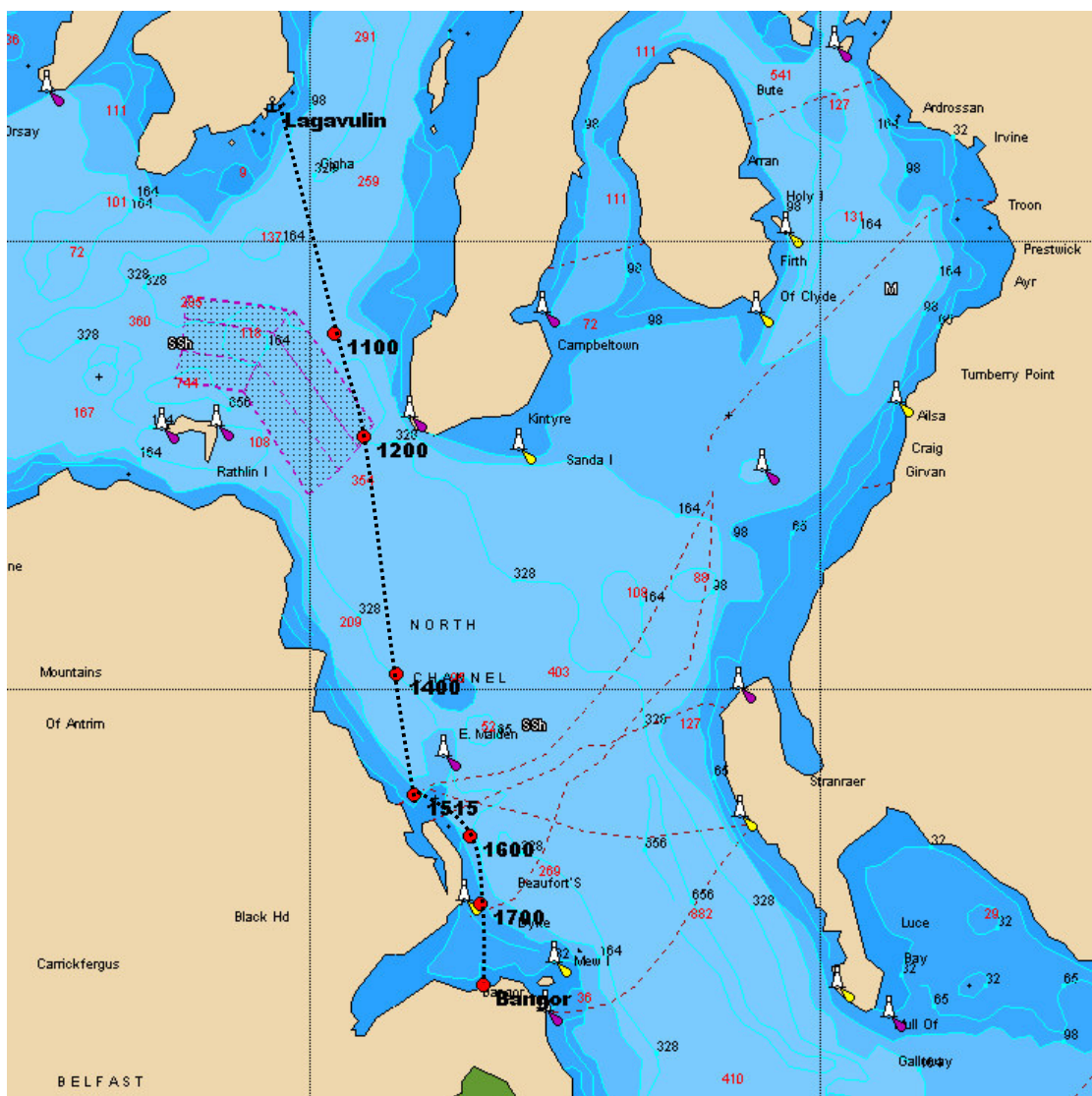
As usual I was up fairly early, while Dairne slept. Listening to the forecast, we were offered a brisk NW, which was then threatening to go southerly for several days. When Dairne woke, and heard the forecast, she immediately agreed that we should head straight for St Georges Channel and take advantage of the weather. Within 30 minutes we were away, motorsailing in N4 wind dead astern in order to make the tide (we should really have left a couple of hours earlier).

The Traffic Separation Scheme in St Georges Channel really gets in the way. It is difficult to cross at right angles without adding considerably to distance, and the chart shows strong tidal eddies at either end. We opted to head towards the Mull of Kintyre and hope to get a good reach across St Georges Channel to the Irish Coast.

By 1000 the wind had backed sufficiently to unroll the genoa and sail. Gradually the south going tide picked us up, and by 1130 we were able to just clip the separation zone and head across to the Irish Coast on a fast broad reach, rarely dropping below



6.5 kts, occasionally touching 8 kts, and a SOG that rarely came below 7kts, and for a short while touched 9kts.



At no time did we see a commercial ship likely to use the TSS. Surely the Coastguard could “switch off” the TSS when there is no shipping?

Despite the tide setting us to the South, we had to head up to keep the genoa drawing (I was reluctant to set the pole in the strength of wind and slightly lumpy sea). The result was that we ended up heading towards Larne. Eventually we were able to bear away a bit more, and the wind dropped a little so the pole was set for half an hour as we tracked inside the Hunter rocks, close by Larne, and well inside the Maiden Rocks and lighthouse.

The breeze then increased, so the genoa was rolled and the pole stowed. A gybe took us back out round Muck Island. I was content to be inshore to try to avoid the tide that was now against us. What I had missed (and eventually found tucked away in one of the pilot books) is a warning that there can be a race off Muck Island. I saw it ahead of us, but it looked as though it was only about 400metres, so we just crashed through fairly chaotic waves for about 15 minutes with 2kts of tide against us. Conditions did



ease, but by now the wind was gusting F6 dead astern so we just ran on under main until we could alter course just a little round Black Head and head towards Bangor. To a degree the wind followed us round the corner, so it was still very broad. A little genoa was unrolled to give some drive, and being oversheeted, it helped to control the slight tendency to broach. Even so it occasionally flogged a little, and it must have



Ariadne running steadily in strong winds – photo taken later in Solent by David Colquhoun

been during one of these excursions that the jib sheet wound itself round the starboard vent cowl. This has happened before, and the cowls are tied on so that if they are ripped off, they are not lost. On this occasion, the whole Dorade box was torn off and dumped by the guardrail, from which it was recovered. Even at this stage, with a foul tide, we were making 5.5kts over the ground.

We rounded up, lowered sail, and motored into Bangor marina at 1915. We had covered 57.6 miles through the water (and a lot more over the ground) at an average speed of 6.1kts. A good sail.

We had used the weather to get us to a safe place where we could restock, rewater, and refuel, with the weather going foul. But we had left Scotland, and started our voyage home, perhaps a little earlier than we had intended, but safely.



Bangor, Northern Ireland





## *Voyage South*

### **Friday 10<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> August: Bangor**

We are not great marina fans (except that they are where others go, leaving the nice places for us), but they do have their uses. Bangor must be one of the best marinas in the UK. The pontoons and finger piers are massive; there is water and electricity immediately adjacent; the security is excellent (partially because of the ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland); the staff are friendly; the showers are huge, clean and included in the marina fee; and the laundry has industrial size machines that work properly. Immediately adjacent are a chandlery and an admiralty chart stockist, and it is only a short walk to an attractive town centre.

The marina fees were at the upper end of the range, but not totally outrageous, bearing in mind the inclusion of showers. Diesel at 35p a litre was, however, expensive.

The two days spent waiting for weather were spent in relaxing, shopping and looking around. Although I walked to the Royal Ulster Yacht Club, an imposing building about half a mile from the marina, there was no one there at the time, and we did not make the effort to go back to meet the locals. I was just afraid that I could end up leaning on the bar chatting to Ian Paisley, with no idea what to say!

As we had entered the marina, we saw that *Girl Jane*, the Norwegian boat we had met in Craighouse, had arrived too. We spent an evening on their boat, meeting for the first time Selje (pronounced “Celia”), Robert’s attractive and patient daughter.

We liked Bangor, and would happily use it again.

### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August: Bangor to Strangford Lough.**

Marinas are all very well, but when cruising on a restricted budget, there is a limit to the luxury. The winds looked as though they would persist with a strong southerly element for some days. In my working days, I had seen presentations about Strangford Lough and its designation as a European SAC. It had looked both interesting and attractive. If we were going to be stuck for a few days, it looked like the place to be. So we decided to take the opportunity of a moderate southwesterly to move further south to Strangford Lough, a distance of about 25 miles. It did, however, involve some fairly precise pilotage if we were to stay close to the coast in flatter water.

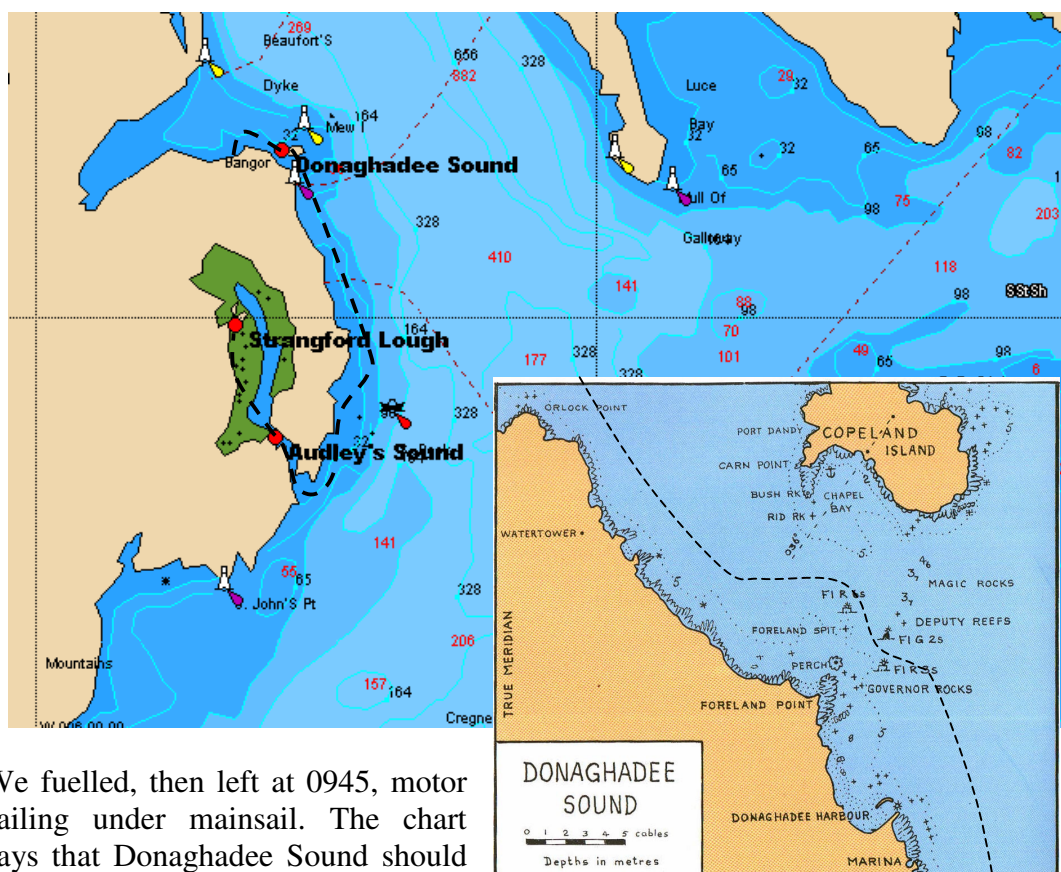
Dairne produced a pilotage diagram for the passage. This was a technique she was shown during her shore based yacht master course at Warsash, and one which works extremely well. We would pass through the Donaghadee Sound, along the coast, then inside a group of rocky isles over a shallow patch before turning into Strangford itself.



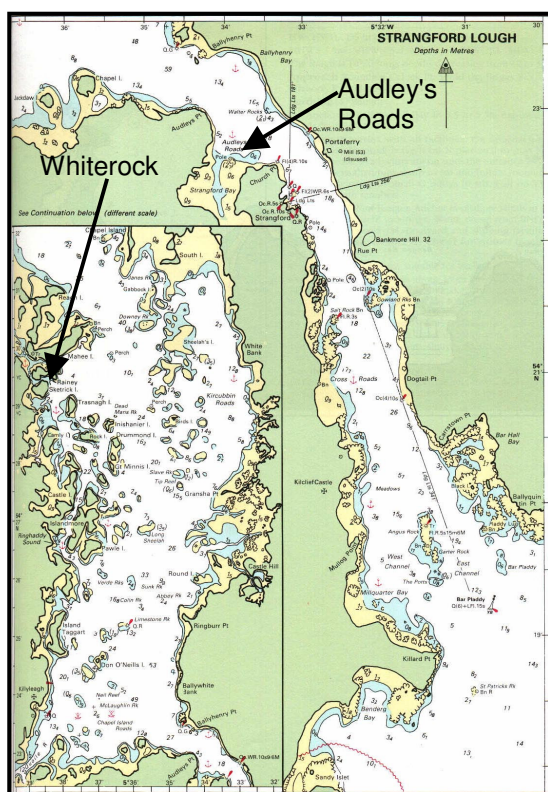
PASSAGE FROM BANGOR TO STRANFORD LOUGH		
	090	
	East past Cardinal	
	Wpt 12	S. lca 06 + LA 155
	1.3 NM	
	225	
	Wpt 11	# ORISK Bn 224
	2 NM	
	199	
	Wpt 10	
	1.8 NM	Shallow (2m)
	197 (9m)	
Wreck drying 2.4 East Cardinal 05 105 beyond (Outer lca) Wreck disused lighthouse (South ridge buoy & South rock lightship)	Wpt 9	4m patch Watch track carefully
	1.9 NM	# TARA Hill
	231	SE KEARNEY POINT
	Wpt 8	North Rock Beacon
	4.4 NM	Potagee 150 WR 55 9m 9m
	184	FL 2 R 10 sec
	Wpt 7	Burial Island
	2.4	
	161	
	Wpt 6	Skullmartin 8 Whis LFI 10 sec
		Skullmartin Rock
		Bally water WR 1.55 5m 9m
	8.7 NM	
	158	
	Wpt 5	Donaghadee Pt 150 WR 450 18/14m
	Visual pilotage	Foreland Pt
FL 2 sec Green Copeland Island	Wpt 4	Red FL R 33
	2 miles	Red FL R 65
	140	
	Wpt 3	Refer Pilot Book P 80
	1.3 NM	
	090	
	Wpt 2	Port can South Briggs
	1.7 NM	
	090	

Dairne's pilotage diagram





We fuelled, then left at 0945, motor sailing under mainsail. The chart says that Donaghadee Sound should not be attempted without local knowledge, but we had talked to some locals, and the Irish Cruising Club pilot provides the rest of the information. In the event, Donghadee Sound was straightforward, but the warnings about strong cross-tides were helpful.

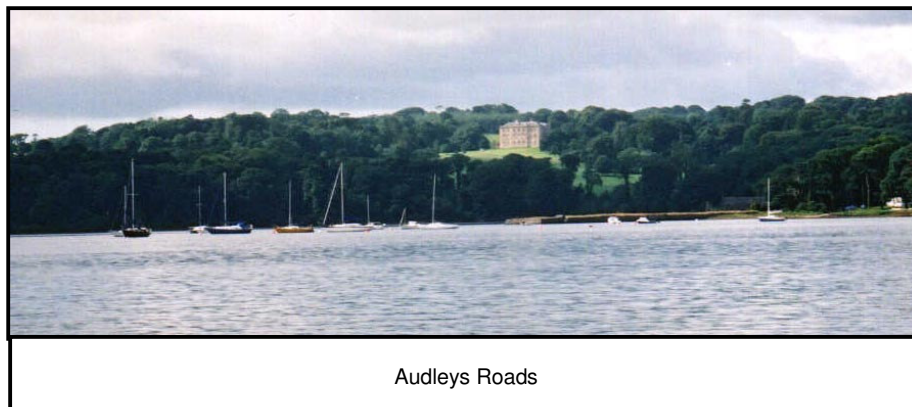


Then down the coast, past Burial Island, the most easterly point of the island of Ireland, and then, with the autopilot on track, we could check the landmarks – north rock beacon, south rock beacon, and over the shallows to turn again south along the coast towards Strangford. The rain brought the visibility down, so the long transits were only occasionally visible, and there was a lumpy sea for the last hour or so approaching Strangford. The IALA buoy was located, we turned into the entrance, giving the Bar Pladdy beacon a wide berth before being whooshed up the narrows by a 4-5kt tide. The charts and pilot book talk about The Ruten Wheel, a whirlpool that needed to be given a wide berth, we did. We





could see the circulation on the water, like the great red spot on Jupiter, but it did not seem to be at its most dangerous.



Audleys Roads

As the visibility was poor, we opted to turn into Audley's Roads and picked up a buoy. In better weather, this would be a beautiful anchorage – not unlike Dunbuoy in Southern Ireland. The weather was grey and wet, and we were content to be secure. Shortly after we arrived, *Girl Jane* appeared and looked at the anchorage, but disappeared over to the marina at Portaferry.

It had been an intensely interesting piece of pilotage.

The afternoon was spent hiding from some unpleasant weather, but it was interesting to watch the local terns skimming hovering and diving. Nature's Stukas!

### Monday 13<sup>th</sup> August: Audley's Roads to Ringhaddy

Our exploration of Strangford waited until the afternoon when the tide turned. We motored gently up, through the islands, identifying all the points to confirm the plotter (although the visibility was still not good enough for long transits). We were now using passage cartridges (we have one for western UK, another for the Channel). These do not give enough detail for close in pilotage, so waypoints had been lifted from the Admiralty chart of Strangford and put in by hand. The system worked well.



Ringhaddy

We entered Ringhaddy Sound, found an empty mooring and secured for the night. There is nothing at Ringhaddy, so we stayed on board.



## Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> –Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> August: Ringhaddy to Whiterock.

This was a fairly early start as we needed the depth of water near high tide to take the passage between the islands to Whiterock, there being one patch of only 1.1m at LAT. This was all done very gingerly, but we were to see others later taking a much more cavalier approach to these shallow sounds between the islands.

On arrival off Strangford Lough Sailing Club we found an empty mooring. Two boats, one clearly a committee boat for the international Wayfarer championships we had seen the day before, the other the club boatman in a RIB came over, welcomed us, and confirmed that the mooring we had chosen would be free for a few days. On the boatman's advice, I went ashore to meet the club secretary and get a security key to gain access to the club – including showers, and to enable us to get in and out of the premises. We were offered a lift to the shops (3 miles away), but did not need to do this as we had stocked at Bangor. Everyone was welcoming, and pleased to see a visitor – a lovely atmosphere.



*Ariadne at Whiterock*



There are at least 8 seals on this rock!

It blew hard from the south, and we were well protected by a small island and Bradocks, only a few metres from the mooring. It was grey and wet, so there was little enthusiasm for a longer run ashore.

The weather was still dubious for a passage south, but promised to be pleasanter after a couple of days, so we decided to stay two nights, and on the second day, after availing ourselves of the Club showers, we celebrated our wedding anniversary with lunch at Daft Eddy's on Sketrick Island, (joined to the mainland by a causeway). After lunch we walked over to the Down CC lightship, but there was little activity.



Strangford Lough Sailing Club



Walking back towards the Stangford Lough Sailing Club we noticed some very Irish road signs. These may have been a prank by the local youths, but there is always the possibility that Irish logic would lead to such signs, which clearly mean that you can exceed 30mph when overtaking!

Back on board we were surprised to see half a dozen seals hauled out on the Bradock Rocks just beside our mooring. They took a quite disdainful view of the boating activity around them, and looked like regulars. Several were a creamy colour, apparently the summer coat of the younger ones. They clearly regarded this as a sheltered spot, endorsing our own decision!



Irish road signs!



SLSC River Class

We had decided that we should visit the SLSC bar in the evening to say "Thankyou" for their hospitality. It was a race evening and we watched the fleets start. There were eight River Class boats (like undersize Sunbeams) and another local cruiser class. They had a good first beat, but the wind faded to nothing and it was nearly 2200 before they were all back and the bar opened, with hot dogs, burgers and other meals available. (Sailing comes first in this Club!). Our first attempt to spend money in the bar was foiled as we were given a free Guinness and beer by the bar steward.



The other local SLSC class

Later on we managed to find our way back in the dark to the mooring after a pleasant evening. The weather had dictated a slightly extended stay in Northern Ireland, and we could not have found pleasanter surroundings or more friendly company.

We found the following framed in the foyer of the Strangford Lough SC. It could apply to quite a few clubs, including Marchwood!

Are you an active member  
The kind that could be missed  
Or are you just contented  
That your name is on the list

Do you attend the meetings  
And mingle with the crowd  
Or do you sit at home  
And crab both long and loud

Do you take an active part  
To help the Club along  
Or are you satisfied to be  
The kind to just belong

Do you ever go to visit  
A member who is sick  
Or leave the work for just a few  
And talk about a clique

There is quite a programme schedule  
That means success if done  
And it could be accomplished  
With the help of  
EVERYONE

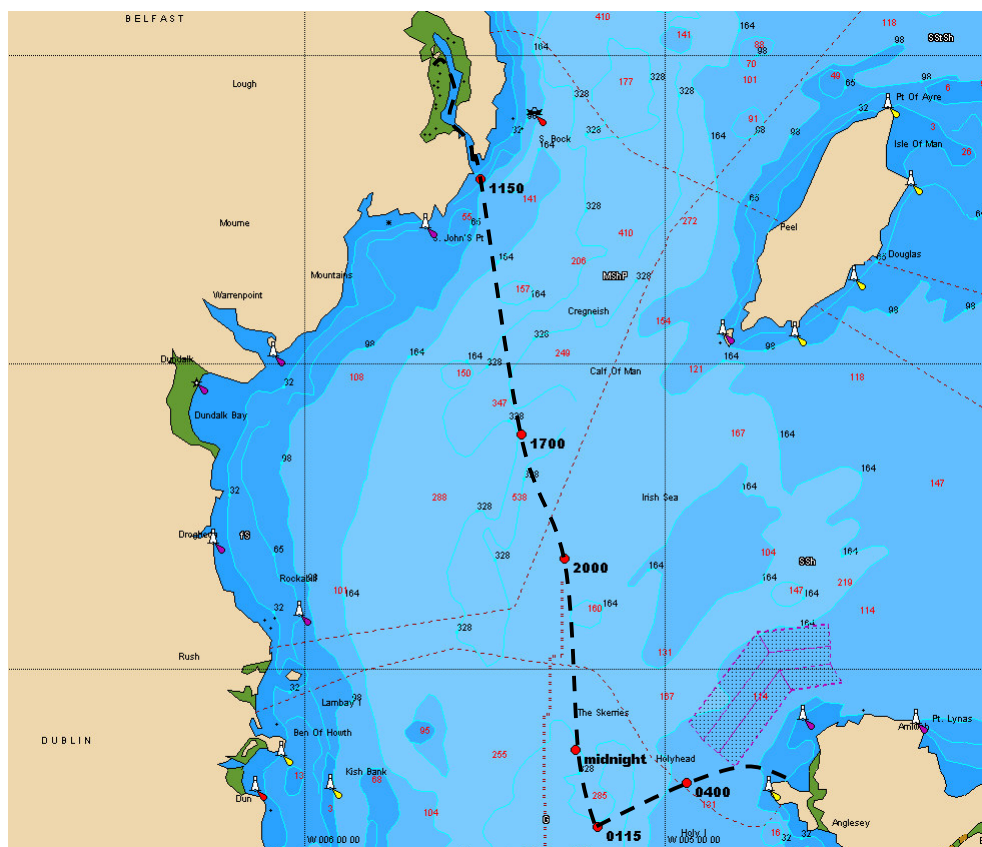
So attend the Yacht Club regularly  
And help with hand and heart  
Don't just be member  
But take an active part

Think this over sailors  
Am I right or am I wrong  
With the help of all the members  
This Club can get along  
Attributed to a past  
Commodore Of Strangford Lough SC





## Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> – Friday 17<sup>th</sup> August: Whiterock (Strangford) to Holyhead



The weather pattern was looking promising with winds W or SW, followed by E or NE winds as a severe depression raced up the Channel and poured scorn and wind on the Fastnet. This looked like an opportunity to go over to Milford Haven, then pick up the NE wind to round Lands End.



Wayfarer fleet

Leaving Strangford is harder than getting in, as the ebb can kick up a wild sea as it pours out. We left at 0915, and motored the length of the lough in a near calm, passing the International Wayfarer fleet on the way. We arrived at the narrows with the tide still flooding, but with the adverse current weakening rapidly.

Once in the open sea, it was still motor sailing as the wind had a strong southerly component, more than forecast. The waypoint was set at the Smalls light as the most recent forecast had offered the chance of going right on to the Scillies. Fishguard and Milford Haven were options.

It was not till 1330 that the wind slanted enough to allow the engine to go off and a partially unrolled genoa to be used, with the sheets very slightly eased. At 1400, a reef was tucked in the main, and we bowled along at 5kts SOG on a mainly sunny afternoon. Nice sailing, if a little lumpy.



The Mountains of Mourne were visible nearly all day

By 1920, the wind faded and the engine was on again. The Mountains of Mourne were still easily visible astern. That's the trouble with high mountains – it takes forever to get to them or away from them.

Dairne, having napped during the afternoon, took the evening watch so I could rest. By 2200 she was looking at a lovely pink and mauve sky to the west as the last of the light faded. By 2300, the glow over Dublin was clearly visible.

I took over at midnight. It was now a fast sail, with a lumpy sea and 6kts SOG. All was going well, although the wind direction was indicating a stopover at Fishguard. That was until the 0150 forecast on radio 4 suddenly uprated the wind strengths for Lundy from 4/5 to 5/6 occasionally 7, and more southerly winds too! It began to look like the depression racing toward the Channel was more severe than was originally thought.



My Watch!

Weighing up the options, we decided to divert to Holyhead, almost 22miles ENE of our position. We bore away onto a near dead run (to compensate for the southerly running tide, and motor sailed (and rolled) most of the way there. By 0400, the wind direction had shifted sufficiently to make sailing feasible, so the motor went off. There was no hurry as we wanted some light as we entered Holyhead.

By 0530, we were rounding the breakwater, and a check with the harbour confirmed that the new marina was partially open. We motored slowly down the pier until it was fully light. As we cruised around looking for a berth, a motor sailer backed out of a finger pier only twenty feet ahead, and I reached for full astern to find a rope round the gear lever. Just in time, I made it and a collision was avoided by a few feet. He apologised, but then our engine stalled. It restarted straight away, but was making a dreadful noise on tick over in neutral. We went round to the breakwater side of the

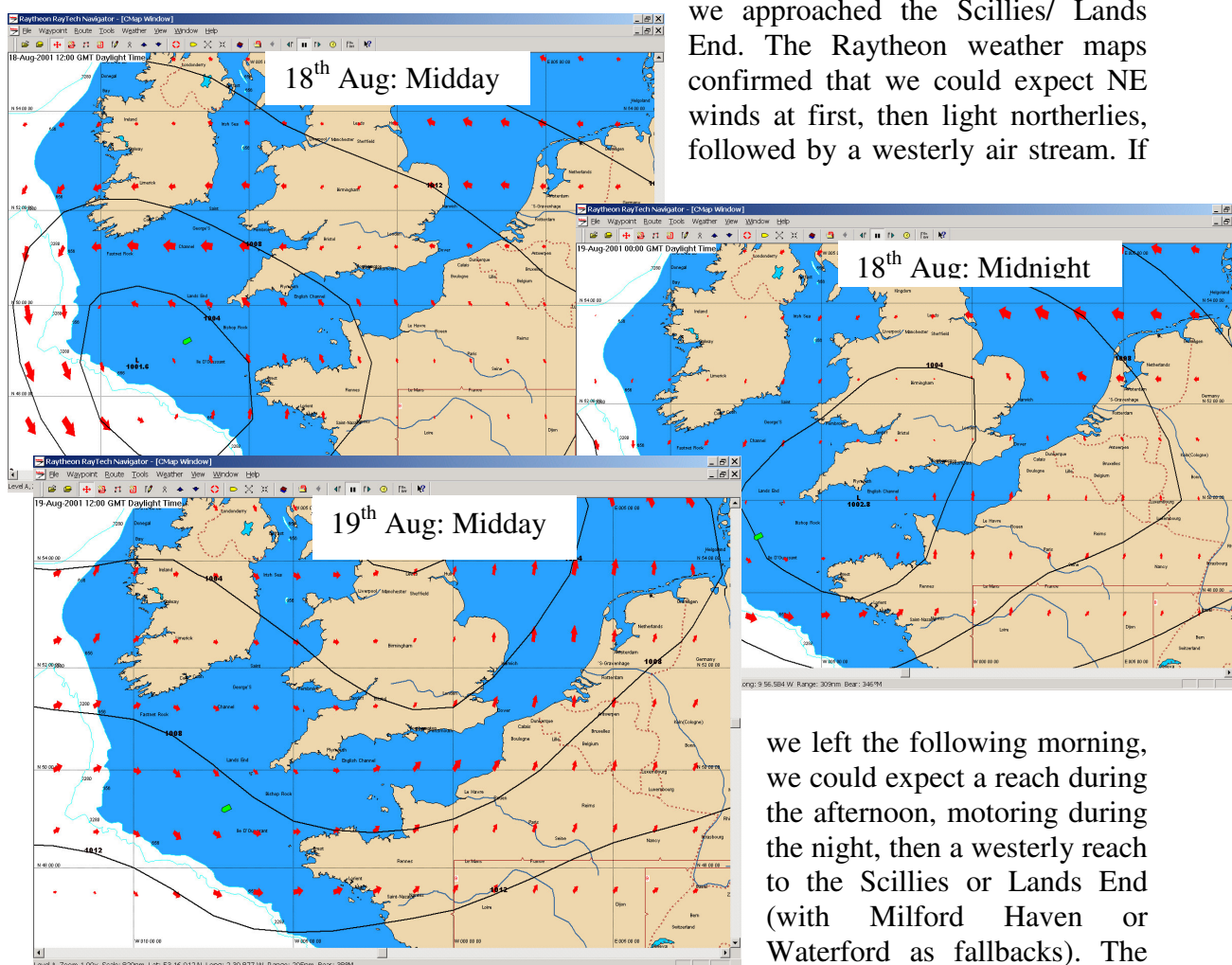


pontoon and found an empty berth. I quickly checked the engine in case a marine engineer or a call to Yanmar was needed, but it turned out that, for whatever reason, the tick over had got too slow, and a minor adjustment had the problem solved.

Of course, the 0535 forecast made no mention of force 7! Perhaps we could have gone on. But we had made our choice, and could now rest. The marina manager was very helpful, and directed us to a pontoon. Then sleep!

Once the cheap rates started, the computer was fired up to look at the weather map because the forecasts seemed to be offering an interesting possibility. The severe depression was still headed for the Channel and would whip round Dover and up the North Sea bringing strong winds there. Meanwhile, another depression off Iceland would bring strong winds to the Hebrides. In the middle of this mayhem, there would be a settled patch in the Irish Sea, although there was the possibility of F6 winds as

we approached the Scillies/ Lands End. The Raytheon weather maps confirmed that we could expect NE winds at first, then light northerlies, followed by a westerly air stream. If



we left the following morning, we could expect a reach during the afternoon, motoring during the night, then a westerly reach to the Scillies or Lands End (with Milford Haven or Waterford as fallbacks). The timings were dictated by the

wind circulation and we would have to take our chance on the tides, which unfortunately were approaching springs. This, then, became the plan, so we relaxed for the evening.

We knew that the Raytheon weather maps relied on the American weather model, so we would need to check that the local forecasts were confirming their predictions. If the American and British weather models agree, then forecast confidence is high.





That evening we visited the Holyhead SC and linked up with Donna and Phil who were sailing a small Westerly with their two youngest children. They joined us on board to see the Rustler and a coffee before retiring.

### **Saturday 18th – Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August: Holyhead to Helford**

#### **Passage Fodder:**

Dairne had put out a Fray Bentos tinned Steak and Kidney pie, one of Mike Thoyt's recommendations, and a tin of stewing steak. The first night at sea, all I had to do was pop the pie in the oven and prepare a few carrots and tip some new potatoes into a pan. On the second night, the spare potatoes went into the same pan as the stewing steak, and it was simple to prepare some cabbage.

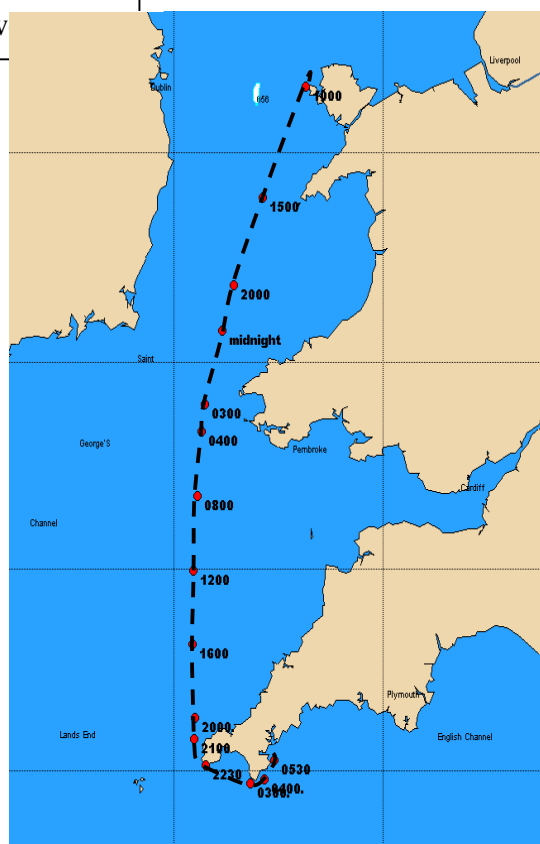
Sometimes Dairne prepares a few rolls for lunch at sea, which we can supplement with a packet soup if it is cold. On this occasion, I made cheese on tomatoes on ham on toast, which was so successful the first day that we repeated it again.

Breakfasts were either toast, or a bacon brunch. Only if it is very settled and steady do we

By 0850, we were away, having rigged the inner forestay in case we encountered stronger winds as we approached the Scillies. It would not get in the way as we expected to be downwind all the way. The wind was ENE F1 and overcast, but warm. Motoring out we had a strong favourable tide from the harbour entrance, but hit the north going stream as we approached South Stack. It took us half an hour to break through and we motored on through the morning in a slight sea. At 1100 we were

as far south as the point where we had turned back for Holyhead two nights before. Shortly thereafter, the engine was stopped and we were broad reaching making 210°, with the wind only just far enough round to keep the genoa drawing properly. There was a slight swell.

We had been followed out by a red sloop called *Red Rover* that we had seen in several places in Scotland. We called them up and compared notes. They had enjoyed their cruise and were on their way back to Milford Haven, where they would be laying up. We were heading further south, so our course was shaped for the Smalls, a group of rocks at the end of a ledge that reaches almost halfway across the Irish Sea from South Wales. Gradually during the day, our courses diverged until they disappeared into the misty visibility – typical of the chance encounters of cruising.



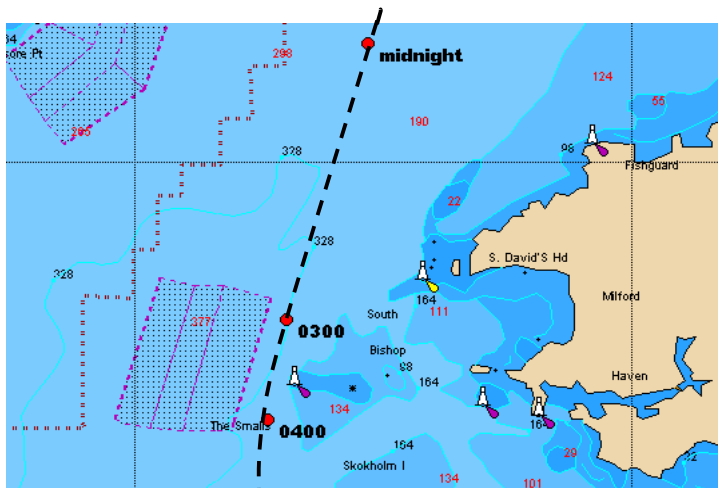




While the sea was no worse than ‘moderate’, we were now seeing the effect of the chaotic weather all round us. The depression to the south had set up a long swell from the south, while the local NE wind had generated its own wave pattern. It was not easy for the boat to find its way through these patterns, but the motion was surprisingly gentle, with only the occasional lurch.

At 0100, I took over again, the Smalls light becoming visible some 30 minutes later, just winking on the horizon. We also saw the South Bishop light.

The tide had been with us since 0100 and it was now a race to get past the strong tides at the Smalls before it turned. Charging along at 7-8kts SOG, the Smalls were close ahead by 0300. There then followed a curious incident. A yacht just ahead called a coaster that had quite properly left the northbound lane heading north. The coaster altered towards the Smalls, having asked the yacht to stand on. The yacht had altered the wrong way, forcing the coaster to turn even more towards the Smalls. He then turned north and was heading directly towards *Ariadne*. A call on the VHF established that he would alter to clear us, and we should stand on. He must hate yachts! He passed at about a quarter of a mile.



At 0335, the Smalls light was abeam – we had made the tide, which turned about 2 hrs later when we were well clear. It is quite a narrow gap between the Smalls and the TSS.

At 0400, the other yacht was on the port bow, his stern light visible, and he then turned towards Milford. It was comforting to be able to confirm all the visual sightings and get actual ranges on the radar, a piece of equipment that we had not used (or needed) in Scotland, but became extremely useful once back into the territory of commercial shipping. As the night wore on, it was clear that shipping tends to

concentrate at the Smalls which are a kind of junction in the Irish Sea routes. None came near, except for the coaster.



One of the dolphins

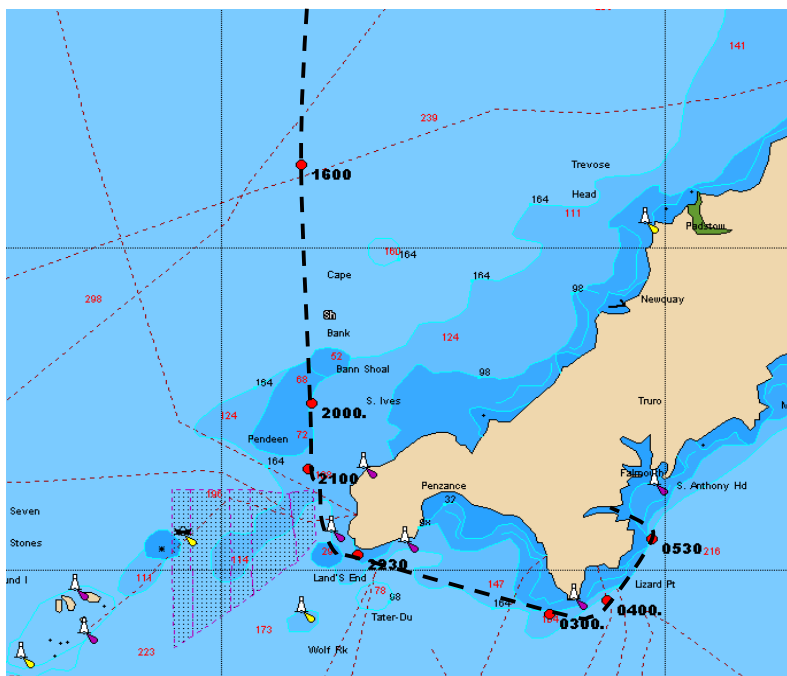
The wind had become a light NNE, insufficient to sail, but enough to develop yet another wave train to add to northerly and southerly swells that already existed. Surprisingly, the motion was not too bad.





At 0800, having had seven hours sleep, Dairne took over again, with nothing in sight anywhere, and so it remained through the morning until the visitors arrived in the form of a group of eight or more dolphins which played round the boat for half an hour.<sup>10</sup> They are incredibly graceful and seemingly playful creatures. Or are they just saying “Turn that bloody engine off!!” I wish we knew!

It was not long after, at 1120, that the wind had moved sufficiently into the west to turn the engine off (thus starting a new swell from the west that crossed the earlier south, north and north-east wave patterns already noted). Despite the wave patterns, there was enough wind for a glorious, sunny reach all afternoon. Magnificent sailing.



The wind went up and down the gears. At 1500 it was W 3-4 and sunny. An hour later it was W 4-5 and cloudy, with a reef in, and an hour later it was 3-4 again. By 1845, it was even lighter and the reef came out. By 1920, the tide was turning our way, and it was still magnificent sailing for most of the day. The tide squirted us past the Longships at 8.5 kts SOG just after dark, and rapidly on to Lands End.

During the late afternoon, Dairne had been getting some water with which to take some Stugeron, lost her balance and fallen awkwardly, producing a bruise on her arm that could put me in jail for wife beating!

We turned the corner and ran slap into a 3kt adverse tide at the Runnel Stone buoy. The engine went on. It took an hour or more to break through into the less strong (but still adverse tide) across Mounts Bay.

As we turned the corner, there seemed to be an armada of ships heading down Channel towards us. This is where radar really scores. It did not take long to identify which ships were close, and where they were going, taking away all the worry. We were definitely back in the Channel! Even the town lights along the shore of Mounts Bay confirmed that this area was much more densely populated than anything we had seen in Scotland.

<sup>10</sup> We think this was probably the same school of Dolphins that was reported in the national newspapers on the Cornish coast a couple of weeks later. There they were playing with swimmers near the beach.

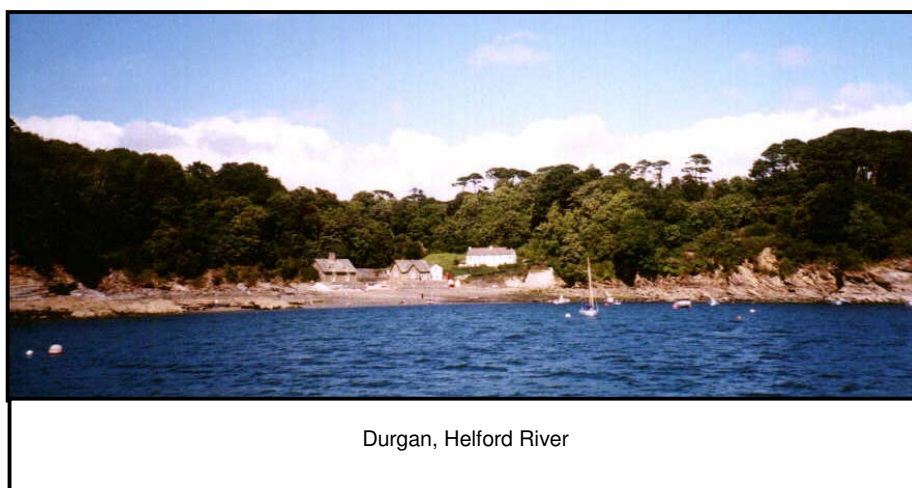


Another interesting feature was the strange pulsing effect of the strong tides. The SOG dropped to 2.1 then rose to 3.3 then back to 2.1 over a cycle of about 60-90 seconds. This was more than the effect of the swell, and one wonders whether there was a low height wave generated by the tide – a genuine ‘tidal wave’! I must ask Ian Townend of ABP Research about this.

At least, on rounding Lands End, the northerly components of the swell disappeared.

Dairne had slept during the afternoon after her fall, and took over at 2100. Our normal plan is for Dairne to look after the evening while I get some rest, and then I look after the period till dawn. But Dairne’s fall had accidentally dogged the watches, but it worked out alright in the end. It was now a run, but there was insufficient wind to drive against the sea, so it was all motoring. However, it was a brilliant night with a clear starry sky and not too cold.

Five hours later, having had some much needed rest, I took over again, with the boat still plugging tide across Mounts Bay. It was not until 0345 that *Ariadne* could start the gradual turn round the Lizard at a distance of about 2 miles, with the remaining swell disappearing to leave flat water. Suddenly, the stars disappeared, it started to drizzle, and the apparent wind increased to 17-20kts, with the electric autopilot only just coping. 10 minutes later, the squall was gone, and we were again reaching in 12kts wind, now comfortably on the quarter. The genoa was unfurled and for the next hour or so the boat sailed itself on the Monitor windvane again, but the wind became so light and shifty that the electric autopilot had to be used to track the boat up to the Manacles buoy which was passed at half a cable at 0530. A glorious reach in flat water past Nare Head brought the trip to a close. We motored into the Helford and



Durgan, Helford River

anchored off Durgan – or tried to! The last time the anchor had been used had been at Ardinamir off Luing, and the chain had been well churned in the locker. Dairne got out of her bunk and sorted it down below. Once cleared, anchoring in 4m was easy. We both crashed into our bunks till 1400 when we woke to a warm, sunny day in what must be one of the most beautiful places anywhere.

259 miles was by far the longest trip we had done, and for the first time we had done more than 1 night at sea. Average speed was 5.7kts. We reckoned it had worked out well, and we were confident we could have gone on, but our watchkeeping would have had to become stricter.



## *Pottering Home*

### **Monday 20<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> August: Falmouth and Helford**

After our long passage we took a rest day, enjoying showers knowing we could top off with water. We had hoped to spend a couple of days at Durgan, but the following morning, the swell was working in on a SE breeze, so it was up and away to Falmouth before breakfast on the Rustler Yachts buoy at Flushing. The plan was to go to the yacht haven in the town for a few hours for shopping then move somewhere else for the night. But when we went over to the haven, there was *Altair*, another Rustler, so we went alongside.

Paul and Susie Ives were waiting for a weather window to take the boat to the Canaries. In fact, Paul would make the voyage with a young lad crewing, and Susie would join later. We were able to help by getting the Raytheon weather maps that evening, from which it looked like there was a good period of settled weather coming up.



Graham & Dairne at Falmouth



*Altair* en route to the Canaries



They introduced us to Greta and Gary, fellow members of the Ocean Cruising Club, who were also waiting for weather to go to Spain in their large well equipped cutter. It led to a sociable evening.

The next day, we saw them off in the late afternoon, after Chris Owen of Rustler had come down to see us both, delivering a new Dorade box to replace the one we had lost, and to look at *Altair*, which had largely been rebuilt inside, an impressive piece of work. We later learned they had had a good passage.





The next few days were spent pottering about between the Fal and the Helford, meeting Peter and Jan Ashby Crane on their Rustler 42, visiting Porth Navas and Helford River Sailing Clubs.



*Ariadne* at Helford



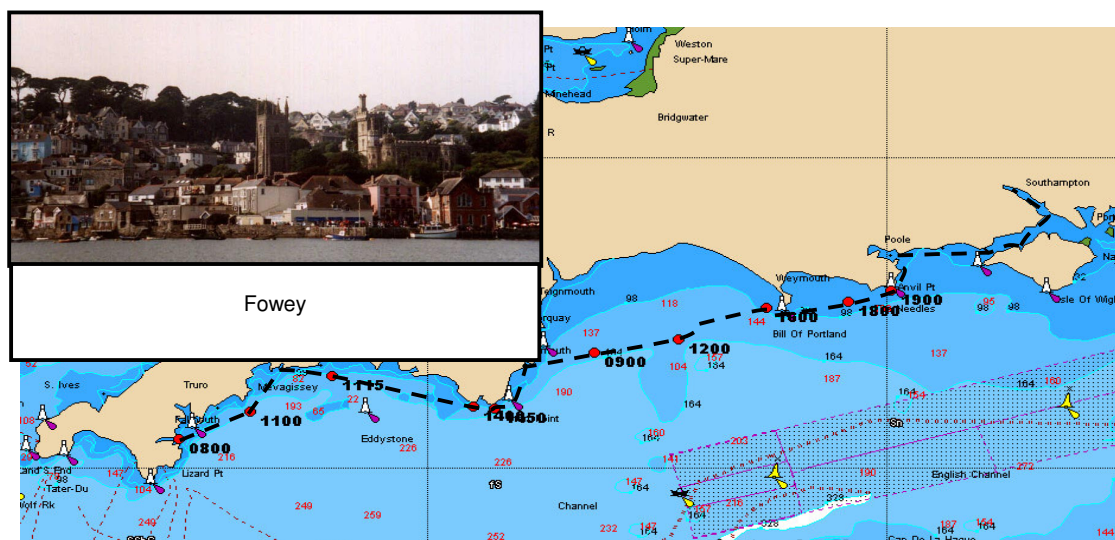
The creek, Helford



John with dogs, Mary & Dairne a respectful distance astern

We had hoped to entertain John and Mary Miller who were in the area, but they turned the tables, and we spent a delightful day and barbecue at their caravan at Rock on the north coast, opposite Padstow.

### Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> Aug to Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> Sept: Along the coast



We had waited out a strong easterly blow at Helford (anchored comfortably above the moorings opposite Porth Navas creek) before starting out on the passage back. Our intention was to call at some of the places we have been racing past during our short summer cruises in recent years. Our first target was Newton Ferrers, but the wind faded and we had to motor. We diverted into Fowey, catching several mackerel on the way. Once there, we found two other Rustlers, *Siosarnoir* on its way back from Spain at the end of Roddy and Dorrie Wade Thomas' first retirement cruise, and *Spirit of*



*Rosinis*, David and Valerie Sadler's replacement for their earlier *Rosinis* that had been sunk by a dredger on charter to ABP! They too were returning from their first retirement cruise to Brittany. Lots of experience to share.



Start Point

allowed us to entertain Dairne's college friend Steve and her husband Mick who farm on Dartmoor. So far they had escaped the dreaded foot and mouth, but they were having a worrying time of it. Good to see them, though.

The next day's run to Dittisham was disappointing as the breeze did not develop until we were round Start Point, after which we had a sparkling reach into the Dart. Mayhem reigned in Dartmouth as it was regatta week, and we managed to creep through and find an empty buoy at Dittisham. A lay day

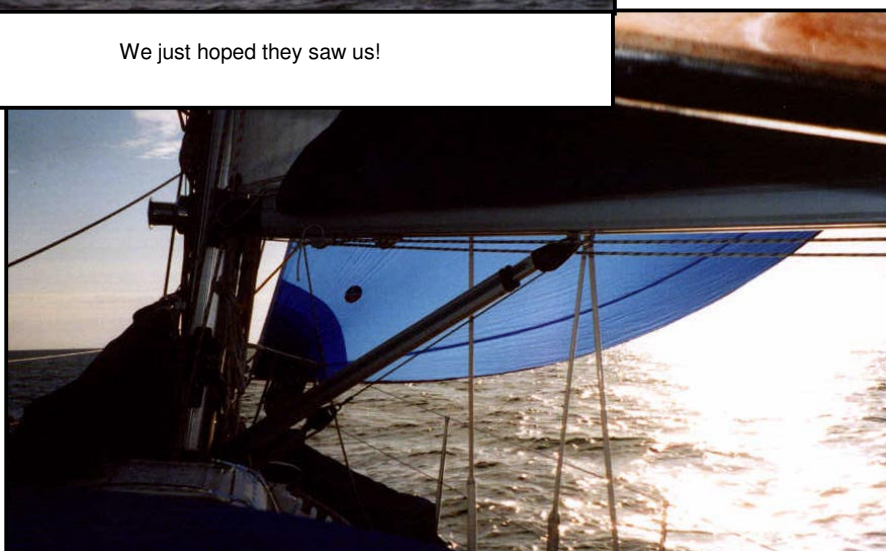


moored off Dittisham, River Dart



We just hoped they saw us!

A start at 0630, followed by a sunny day, 4½ hrs under cursing chute, and a gradually strengthening run



The Cursing Chute pulled for 4½ hours! Wonderful!

past Portland (close in), making the tide past St Albans to anchor in Studland just before dusk represented one of the best day's passage sailing we have ever had in the English Channel. Shirtsleeve warmth and good sailing! When crossing Lyme Bay our





peace was shattered by the Cowes-Torquay powerboat race - but we didn't mind too much.

The trip was 69.5 miles, and we averaged 5.1 kts, including a period during the early afternoon when the wind dropped and went round into the west so our progress was quite slow for a while until we reluctantly handed the cursing chute and poled out the genoa as the new wind gradually filled in.



Approaching the inside passage at Portland

A few days spent in the Poole area allowed me to see my pensions adviser, and we then had a sparkling broad reach to Newtown, where we spent a lazy day before getting back to Marchwood.



Back in the playpen! Newtown creek I.O.W.

During the course of the cruise we had logged 2093.5 miles, without any major gear failure, and had only run aground once - in Newtown creek when we hit one of the concrete blocks under a mooring at low tide! Overall, the weather had not produced a vintage season for the Hebrides, but we had enjoyed it immensely. Scottish scenery has a unique grandeur which can be enhanced by bad weather, but we would like better weather to visit the Summer Isles! So back we go next year!





In the course of the cruise we had encountered several other Rustler 36s going about their business including

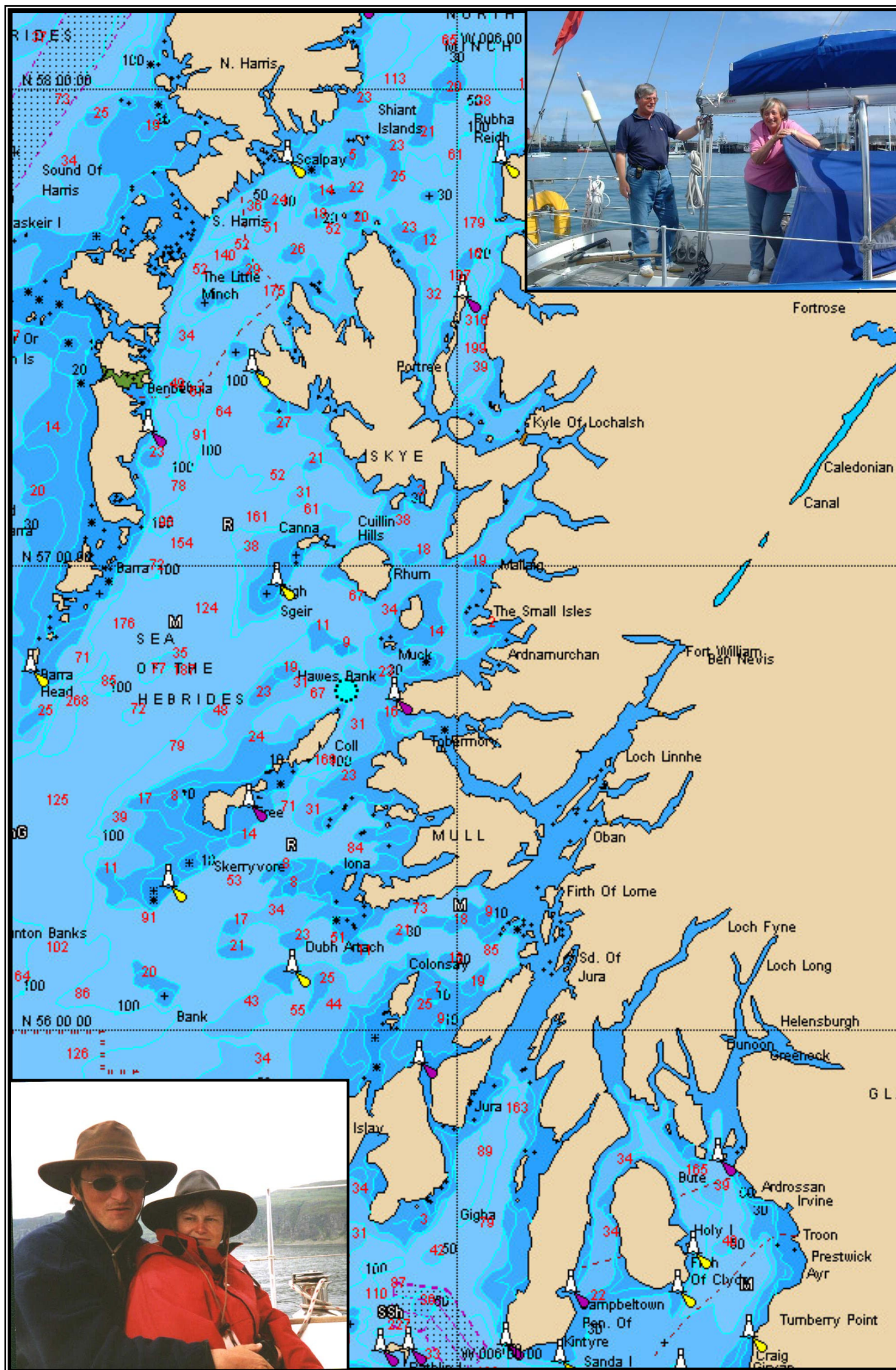
Boat	Where seen	Route
<i>Cayembe</i>	Ardfern	Home base
<i>Sea Jade</i>	Puilladobhain	Returning from short cruise
<i>Celtic Spirit</i>	Rum	Returning after abandoning trip to Iceland
<i>Tamaray</i>	Loch Boisdale	Being delivered home by single handed crew
<i>Wild Bethony</i>	Loch Spelve	On charter
<i>Altair</i>	Falmouth	En route to Canaries
<i>Siaosanoir</i>	Fowey	Returning from Spanish cruise
<i>Spirit of Rossinis</i>	Fowey	Ending first retirement cruise

We also had emails from Peter and Maureen Shaw as they started on their planned four year circumnavigation in *Another Bold Venture* with a very rough Biscay crossing.

As there are just over a hundred Rustler 36s about, this is quite a high percentage, and we know of many others who are also so much more intrepid than we have been. All of us have faith in our boats, and we always felt well protected by *Ariadne* right to the moment we picked up the buoy at Marchwood.

Footnote:

A few weeks after the end of the cruise, just after the Southampton Boat Show, we met six other Rustler 36s at the annual rally at the Folly – although one of the boats was Mike and Maggie Thoyts' Fulmar (designated an 'honorary Rustler') which they sail in the summer, then go to the West Indies where Mike's Rustler now resides. Terry Eagle refused to believe that I had properly retired on the grounds that I was still wearing a watch! My defence was that it was the only way I could find out the day of the week!







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As of Last Complete Printing  
Number of Pages: 122  
Number of Words: 25,280 (approx.)  
Number of Characters: 144,097 (approx.)