

HEBRIDEAN FAMILY ADVENTURE

We left Rhu Marina on Friday 24th June at about 18:00, the boat loaded to the gunwales with stores, water, fuel, and a couple of stowaways. Flora and Clive (Dorothy's sister and brother-in-law) had their boat, Lyrebird, damaged in the May gale, and they were hitching a ride with us for the first half of our holiday. We motored to Rothesay, wind on the nose as usual. Dinner was washed down with red wine from what looked like a hospital drip bag. Clive had liberated it from its box to ensure maximum extraction.



Next day we sailed down the East of Bute and across towards the Kilbrannan Sound. The good weather disappeared at Lochranza and we motorsailed the rest of the way to Campbeltown in drizzle and no wind, keen not to miss the delights of the Taj Mahal.

On Sunday, like us, the yacht outside us was leaving early to catch the tide round the Mull. Their skipper was up at 5:15 to rally his troops! We were a little more civilised, Clive and I getting up at 6 to cast them off while the ladies had tea in bed.

We sailed and motorsailed past Sanda and the Mull, before heading towards the Ardmere Islands. A quick check of the tidal curve on the plotter revealed that we could make the tidal gate at the Sound Of Islay, so we pressed on. Modern technology can be over-rated but it certainly does make life easier when it works.

The wind in the Sound was strong, but favourable, and we poled out, then broad reached at more than 8kts. We arrived at Glenbatrick Bay, Jura, at 15:45, anchoring behind the protection of the rocks. Dorothy produced one of her famously enormous casseroles, which I'm sure cuts at least 0.5kts off the boat speed. Clive thought the chicken was delicious, even though it was pork! We watched a lovely sunset, with the light reflecting off the windows in the house, as if it they were painted gold.



After sunset we invented a new method of distance measuring. An After Eight mint paper is 15NM on my passage planning chart! We estimated tomorrow's passage to Gunna as about 3/4 After Eights, equivalent to about 50NM! I suppose that must be the polar opposite of new technology.



Monday dawned sunny but calm, and we had to motor all the way to Gunna. The anchorage was a bit tricky to enter, but we crept in and anchored securely. The log measured 44NM so our patented After Eight measuring system wasn't too inaccurate after all. Maybe I could get on Dragons Den with it!

After a siesta, aided by some gunwale to gunwale rolling in the swell, we went ashore, getting soaked as the waves swamped the dinghy. It was clearly my fault for choosing the wrong landing beach, as the crew made very clear. We explored the island, enjoying the warm

sun, and the views South to Tiree and North across the turquoise channel to Coll. Ten minutes after we returned to the boat she must have looked like a laundry ship, with all the wet clothes festooning the lifelines.

It was a lovely morning on the Tuesday and we had an exhilarating sail across the Minch in a steady F4/5. We were joined en route by a pod of dolphins, swimming and jumping all around the boat for about 15 minutes. They were having a great time, seemingly playing with the boat just for fun.

We arrived at Eriskay mid afternoon, and picked up a visitors mooring. I can't explain it but there was something really special about the atmosphere of the anchorage. It is also very sheltered once you negotiate the transits on the way in. As we walked over the hill to The Politician inn we were able to appreciate how shallow the waters surrounding the island are, seeing the different shades of blue and turquoise in the water, speckled with the white horses. Whisky galore caused by rocks galore!

A combination of the sun, wind and beer made my face feel like it was on fire as we walked back to the anchorage by the beach and ate a late dinner on board. This was followed by red wine, a slab of chocolate cake and half a packet of Rennies.

The good weather was holding as we headed for Loch Maddy on the Wednesday. We had a great sail in a South-westerly F3/4 all the way. The only free visitors mooring seemed very close to the ferry docking area, but the depth was fine and we picked it up anyway.

We were enjoying a beer and a chat in the cockpit when the car ferry approached menacingly. I felt like the lifting bow was going to swallow us up, like a scene from James Bond. All that was missing was the dramatic music, Sean Connery, and (unfortunately) the bikini clad ladies (there



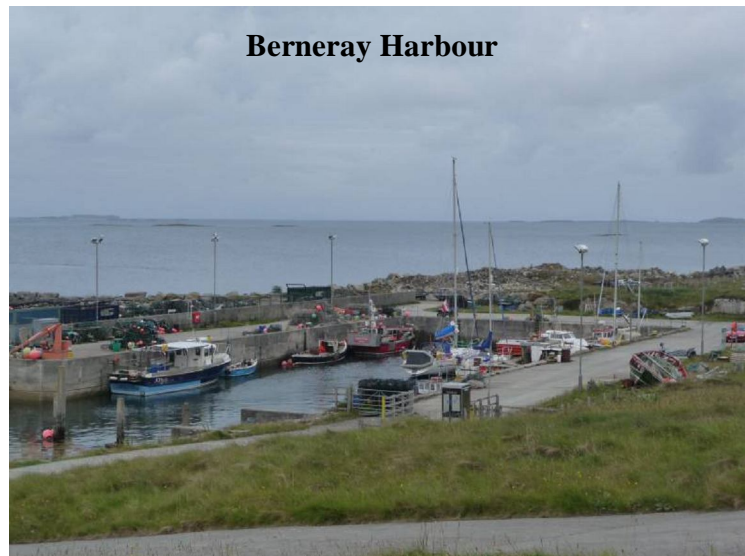
were no volunteers on board).

Accessing the ferry terminal Wi-Fi on the laptop, we got the forecast for the next week. More good weather and favourable winds! Maybe this would be another summer to remember, like 1982 when we had last shared a boat with Flora and Clive, cruising the West Coast on Hanky Panky, their Highlander 28.

The ferry had not finished with us yet. Next morning it woke us at 7 o'clock with the cars booming over the ramp. I think every car on Uist must have been leaving the island!

We visited the shop and the Taigh Chearsabhaigh museum/café ashore. Back on board, Flora broke one of her many pairs of glasses. These were apparently her “general specific” pair.

On the Thursday we sailed North towards Berneray, stopping at Hermetray for lunch. As we left, Ewen noticed a change in the exhaust note, and suggested that some weed had wrapped round the saildrive after I prized it off the anchor. He was correct, and we saw it floating off when we reversed temporarily. Well done Ewen! The route into Berneray harbour would have been difficult enough to follow, without the added complication that some of the buoys have been removed recently, but are still marked on both my plotters. Fortunately, Clive and Flora had been here before and kept us on course through the channels.



After walking to the village museum on Friday morning, where we read all about the island's history and wildlife, and got an internet weather forecast, we walked over the island and through the machair and sand dunes to the West Beach. It was a grey day, but the huge beach was still spectacular. Ewen was in contemplative mood (exam results pending) and walked along the beach for miles. The oldies sat in the dunes after a short stroll.

We had dinner at the Ardmore Café. I had met the chef retrieving my lobster from a creel hanging in the harbour only an hour before! My lobster was very nice, but the other meals were nothing to write home about. I didn't share my lobster, but I did accidentally share a lot of the liquid as I cracked the shell and claws open. Everyone's clothes smelt fishy by the time we left to walk back to the harbour!

Preparing to leave on the Saturday, Clive gathered up the rubbish and put it in the bin. Unfortunately, he also accidentally binned a bag of Flora's clothes, which he had to retrieve hurriedly when this was noticed.

We entered the Sound Of Harris via the appropriately named Reef Channel at Bays Loch. It is not for the faint-hearted, and should only be attempted on a rising tide. We sailed to Taransay in sun and a good South-east wind, rounding Toe Head and passing the expansive sands of Luskentyre en route. We

Taransay Beach



went ashore to explore some of the island, walking along the beach and up to the bothy. The bothy isn't exactly 5-star accommodation, but on a wild night I'm sure the little stove, make-shift seats, and fishing-net hammocks would feel just as luxurious.

After lunch we sailed round the East of Taransay, West of Scarp, then North of Kearstay, picking our way between the rocks onto which the large Atlantic waves were crashing, raising plumes of spray. The wind had now reached a good F5/6.

We anchored between Kearstay and Scarp. It was so tranquil and quiet in that little gem of a lagoon - the water turquoise, the cliffs sheer and dark pink, and the sandy beach as lovely as any in the world. What a special place. We went ashore with our barbeques, and enjoyed a wonderful sunny evening on the beach. Ewen went swimming, and claimed the water was warm. We took his word for it, but found out for ourselves later anyway!

Getting back out to the boat was no easy matter. Despite the calmness in the lagoon, there was a huge swell on the steep beach, and the dinghy shot in and out in the surf. The outboard skewered Clive's leg and we all got soaked.

After breakfast in the warm and sunny cockpit, we set off for West Loch Tarbert on the Sunday. We had to return Flora and Clive to Tarbert to catch the ferry to Uig. Our luck was holding in terms of wind as well as sun, as we enjoyed another good sail without having to tack once. We anchored off the East side of Taransay, just North of the sandy spit, for lunch, before motoring to West Loch Tarbert.



Scarp From Kearstay

We went ashore to stretch our legs, walked into Tarbert, and had a very good meal at the Pierhouse Bar. It seems that the Highlands and Islands are finally realising the need for good quality food and service.

It was an early start on Monday as I ferried Flora and Clive ashore to catch the ferry. We were sorry to be seeing them off, as we'd enjoyed great times and many laughs over the past week or so. It had been just like that holiday 29 years ago, exploring new places, sailing as a family, and enjoying great weather.



When I got back on board we set off for Camus Uig, unfortunately having to motor all the way. This was the unspoilt Outer Hebrides we'd hoped for – green/blue sea glinting in the sun, a sheltered anchorage, a beautiful white sandy beach framed by islands and rocks, and only us there to lap it up.

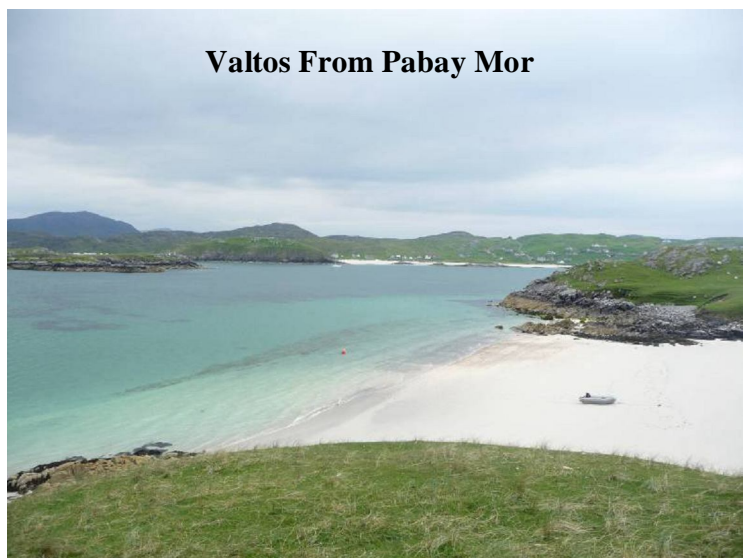
We rowed ashore to explore. I picked my way round the rocks to the headland to take photos of the anchorage. After a while I looked back and saw that the tide was rapidly cutting me off! With Ewen and Dorothy laughing hysterically at me, I made my way back, jumping from rock to

rock like a demented mountain goat, slipping and sliding as I went.

We actually saw another yacht today, heading round the North of Scarp. In some ways it is a pity that more yachts don't explore out here, but I suppose part of the appeal of the Outer Hebrides for us is its isolation and the lack of other people. I suppose the scarcity of yachts is due to the challenge of getting here (not to mention back!).

The morning forecast was favourable on Tuesday so we decided to press on North to West Loch Roag. We left at 12:00, with a single reefed main and 2/3 genoa in a 25kt South-easterly. We had a great sail up past Gallan Head, powering over the large waves and swell, and round into the Kyles Of Pabbay Mor. We anchored between Skioram Mor and Valtos, nicely sheltered.

After lunch we took the dinghy to the beach on Pabay Mor to explore. A London doctor uses an old black house as a holiday home, where he lives off home-grown produce and shellfish when in residence. Not luxurious, but what an outlook! I admired the vista of East Loch Roag beyond the two Berneras, South to Loch Roag, Miavaig, and Floday, and West to Valtos. What a sailing paradise.

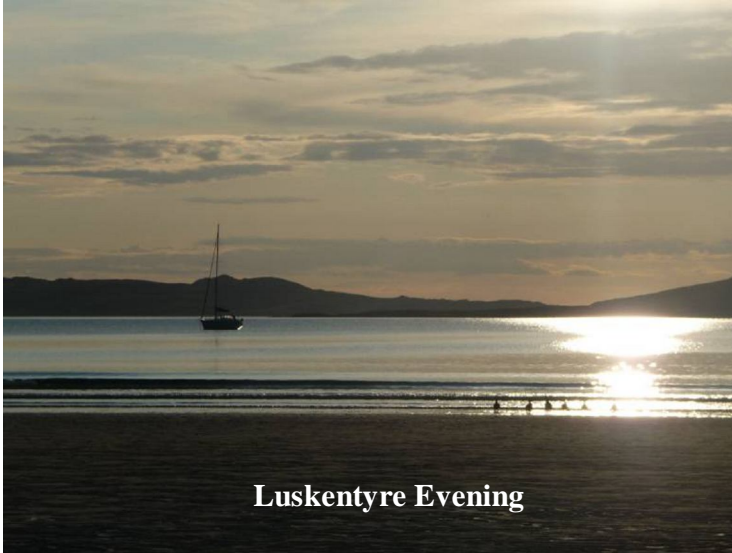


We walked round Pabay Mor, to the spectacular natural arch formed by the incessant pummelling of the Atlantic waves. On the way back it started drizzling. I can advise that Henri Lloyd TP Ocean boots are not the most suitable footwear for climbing up and down steep hills covered in wet grass.

The Wednesday forecast was for strengthening wind, so we decided to head South. We left Valtos in 30kts from the East/North-east. This made for an exhilarating and fast sail to West Loch Tarbert. Our

fastest speed was 9.8kts, despite attempts by Ewen to break the magic 10. Dream Catcher showed her seaworthiness by riding the large waves well, and in more comfort than most modern boats would.

We went ashore at Tarbert on Thursday morning, and had lunch, followed by a swim in the excellent sports centre pool.



I was berated for being over-cautious as I insisted on getting 40 litres of diesel at the local garage. The owner took pity on me and I was kindly given a hand carrying the cans back to the dinghy. This more than made up for the rather high price.

It was only a 7 mile gentle sail to Luskentyre but we were so glad that we decided to anchor there overnight. There was virtually no wind and the sea was glassy calm as we went ashore for a walk along the vast sandy beach. The wavelets at the water's edge gently formed an intricate pattern of undulations on the sand

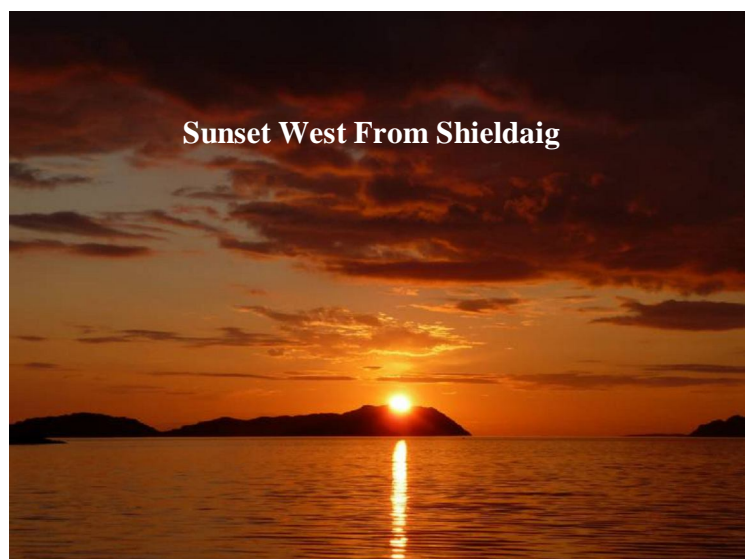
as the tide receded. The air of peace and tranquillity was almost palpable. I can still remember that feeling, soaking in the surroundings and the atmosphere. It is for times like these that we go through the (hopefully occasional) trials and tribulations of yacht ownership.

Back on board, we ate dinner at the cockpit table. This was followed by yet another beautiful sunset, this time Taransay providing the foreground.

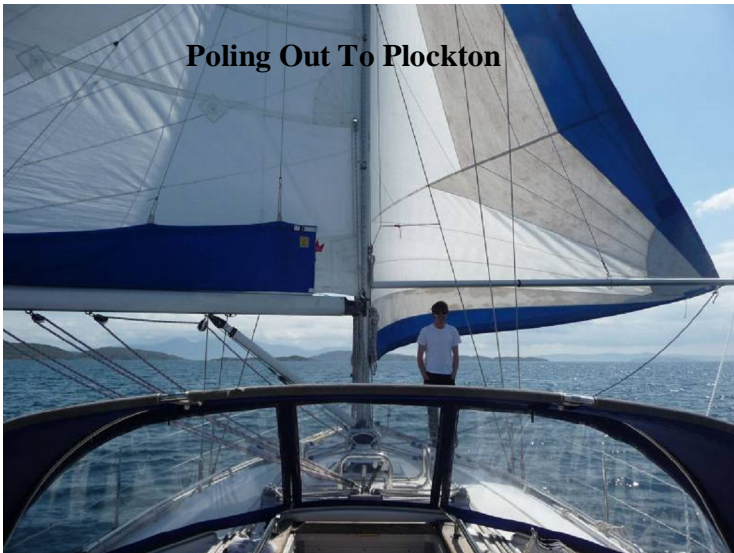
We left Luskentyre at 10 o'clock next morning to get the tide through the Sound Of Harris, zigzagging through the various marked channels before emerging into the expanse of the Minch.

The Minch remained glassy calm, allowing me to remind my doubters that you can never have too much diesel in the tank. As we approached Shildaig after 58 miles of motoring, it felt crowded after having anchorages to ourselves for so long. Six boats!

We had a beautiful evening, the sun highlighting the Torridon hills in a patchwork of vivid green grass, deep purple heather, and stark grey rock through the crystal clear air. The sun eventually dipped behind the rocky headland at the South side of the loch entrance, reappearing out for a last flourish like a fireball rolling down the headland into the sea.



It was an inauspicious morning, grey but dry, as we left Shieldaig on Saturday. When I lifted it, the anchor was festooned with a huge weedy mass, and starfish had entwined themselves in the chain. It was a tricky job to dislodge them without amputation (both the starfish and me) as I leant over the bow.



The sun came out and we poled out in a gentle Northerly wind on the way to Plockton, where we managed to grab the last visitors' mooring. After an excellent meal at the Plockton Hotel, we planned our route for the next few days. This seemed to involve my crew poking as many holes as possible in my chart with the dividers, much to my annoyance. The chart can now be used as a sieve.

The sun came out in the evening, and I read my book, *Godforsaken Sea*, in the cockpit until the light faded and the tea dried up. It is a superb book about the 1996/7 Vendee Globe and the astonishing

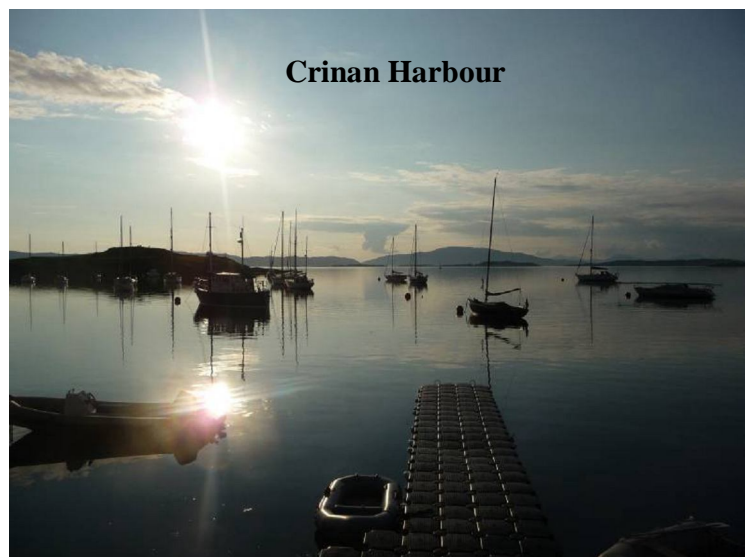
conditions experienced by the sailors.

Sunday brought gentle North-westerly wind as promised, and we left at lunchtime. As we drifted below the Skye Bridge, our son Andrew phoned from Greece. We arranged that he and his girlfriend would help us back through the Crinan Canal on Thursday. The sail to Eigg was great, as the wind got up to 20-25kts after Kyle Rhea. A single reef in the main and a few rolls in the genoa soon got Dream Catcher reaching comfortably at 7kts. The clouds over Rhum and Eigg were black and threatening, but we miraculously escaped any rain and it brightened up later in the evening.

I watched a family of otters playing about for a while early next morning. The Pol Nam Partam anchorage, just North of the harbour on Eigg, is an ideal habitat for wildlife, with its stream, rocks, seaweed, and beach. The water was so clear that I could easily see the sandy bottom about 10 metres beneath the boat.

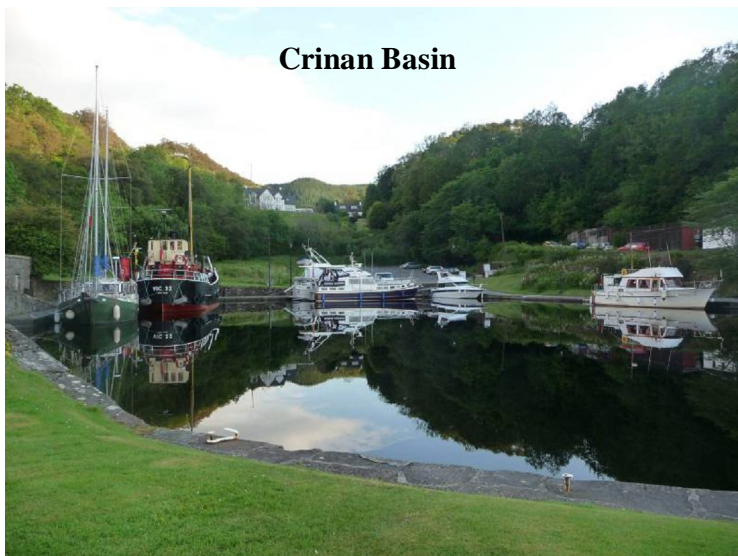
The wind picked up enough for us to have a good sail to Ardnamurchan Point. All the time we sailed South in the sun, the Sound Of Sleat looked like it had been stuffed with thick grey cotton wool. We motored the rest of the 26 miles to Tobermory, picking up a mooring at 12 o'clock. We had dinner on board and an evening stroll ashore. I have to confess I succumbed to the smell coming from the fish and chip van on the pier. The "scallop supper" looked absolutely wonderful.

Was this really July in Scotland? I think



this must have been the best two weeks of weather since we'd been here with Flora and Clive in 1982!

We motored to Crinan next day in full sun and on the glassy sea, did a quick-step through the Dorus Mor, and then ventured into the Gulf Of Corryvreckan where the boat did a bit of waltzing around in the whirlpools. I felt like I had entered Strictly Come Dancing. Didn't we do well!



Crinan Basin

After dinner we went ashore and walked along the canal towpath, the boats reflected in the canal like a mirror.

We picked Andrew and Hannah up at the jetty on the Wednesday morning, and headed for Craighouse. Hannah thought the scenery was stunning, Jura showing off her mountainous glory in the sun.

We picked up a mooring, spruced ourselves up (yes, we can do it if we try) and went ashore for a walk and a good meal at the Jura Hotel.

Oh dear, more sun and no wind next morning, so we had to motor all the way back to Crinan. We were disappointed that Andrew and Hannah were not getting a good sail, but we all had a good time anyway. We only made it to Dunardry before the canal closed, as we were going through alone and there was a bit of West going traffic.

We had enjoyed having Andrew and Hannah for the past couple of days. We had good fun and were sorry they had to leave us, although maybe they weren't so sorry to leave after all their hard work in the canal!

Chicken curry on board was followed by a midge-fuelled walk, and some more Godforsaken Sea.

I was up at 8 o'clock on the Friday, determined to get going as soon as the canal opened. The crew complained I was rustling, clicking, banging, and clattering until they got up. No, of course it wasn't deliberate!



Craighouse

We had an easy second half of the canal, taking our time until we "cleared customs" at Ardrishaig just as the rain started.

The journey to Portavadie was miserable, with wind and rain on the nose. Mind you, we didn't feel too hard done by, as we saw a fleet of Cornish Crabbers pounding slowly into it. Their crews did not have a big sprayhood under which to shelter as the autohelm steered the boat, as we had.

The hot showers at Portavadie seemed very luxurious after our three weeks on board, after which we enjoyed a good meal, and a relaxed coffee on the comfy chairs.

I took advantage of being in the marina, filling with water and hosing the boat, rigging, etc. down with fresh water. The fine West Coast sand had found its way into everything.

We had a superb sail on the sunny Saturday afternoon, passing the Tobermory racers as we reached down to Ardlamont and up the West Kyle, before poling out from the head of the Kyles to Rothesay.

Our good fortune with the weather continued even on our last day. A Northwest wind allowed us to close reach up to the Cloch, before freeing off the sails as we sped to Rosneath and Rhu at 7kts.



In conclusion, we had been very fortunate indeed with the weather. Aeolus had smiled upon us by giving us Southerlies when going North and Northerlies when going South. How often does that happen? We had also pushed our boundaries, just as we had last year when we reached St Kilda. The result was a feeling of achievement, and surprise that we had made it to all those places that we'd barely hoped we would reach as we read the Sailing Directions last winter - Berneray, Taransay, Scarp, and West Loch Roag to name but four.

Once again, we had reluctantly bypassed all the anchorages on Skye, but we consoled ourselves by remembering that we can look forward to exploring them next year. Where are those Sailing Directions?

Permanent Crew:- Alastair, Dorothy and Ewen Cameron

Temporary Crew:- Clive and Flora Reeves, Andrew Cameron and Hannah Evans

Alastair Cameron

"Dream Catcher", 2001 Bavaria 40