



ELISHA's Cruise in 2005

**Lymington, Ireland, Scotland
and the Hebrides**



Introduction



Robert & Elisha, Skipper and Crew

Elisha and I (Robert Stevenson) had owned various boats over the years, starting with an eight foot dinghy. Now we had what was, in our terms, our first 'big' boat. We had previously taken our 26 foot single diesel open Jeanneau Leader up the Seine to Paris and as far south as the Audierne through the Raz du Seine, but for Scotland we thought needed some shelter and a little more living space. We bought our new Jeanneau Prestige 34 in February 2005 in Cherbourg. She was named Elisha, as had been her pre-decessors. Elisha (the boat) was 10 metres in length with a broad beam and twin Volvo six cylinder KAD 43 diesel engines with Volvo Duo-Prop outdrives. Each engine developed 230 bhp. Elisha cruised comfortably at 25/28 knots if the sea was calm but this reduced to 18 knots or less when, for example, running into a F4 headwind. In a following sea she was superb and in a Force 4 could comfortably maintain 20 knots. We were to see very little of following seas on our voyage.

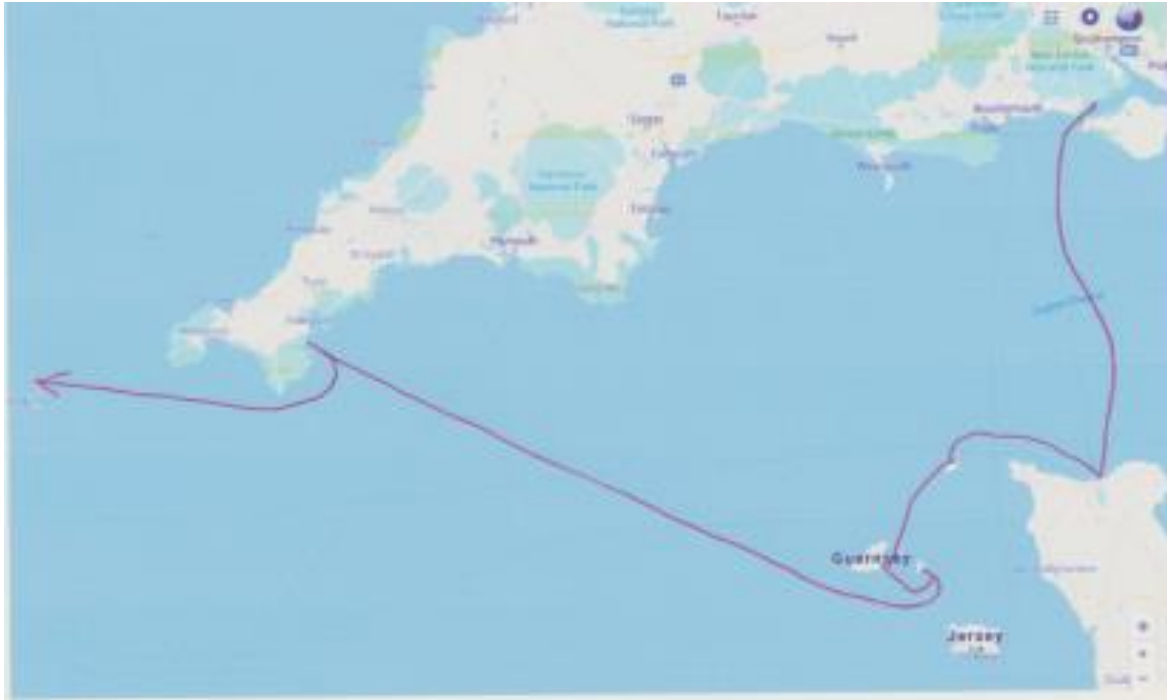
We had done a couple of Channel Crossings in Elisha, generally given her a shakedown and got to know the best way to handle her. Now, at last, we had got the time to go further afield and make some proper use of her as we had intended. The plan was to head for the North of Scotland while diesel prices in UK were still possible, at least in the sense of not paying road tax.

We set off from Lymington to Cherbourg in late June to get a repair done by Cherbourg Plaisance under warranty and by 1st July were ready to go north direct from Cherbourg. We had the charts, we had pilot books, we had loaded wine and beer, we had most spares and tools. The north beckoned. I had in mind the prevailing South Westerly winds when doing my planning. I don't know where they got to but from the beginning we were plagued with northerly winds usually right on the nose, Elisha's worst point with her broad bluff bow. As a result, we were behind schedule almost from the first day.

To follow the Scottish part of the voyage the best map by far is the 'West of Scotland Sailing Map'. A planning guide for Yacht Cruising from Rivers Publishing. ISBN 9780955061462. All distances are in Nautical Miles.

The Voyage

Lymington, Cherbourg, Falmouth, Scillys



2nd July 05 – Alderney

We left Cherbourg at 1735 for Alderney and arrived in Braye Harbour at 1945 BST. It was uneventful but choppy as we crossed the head of the Alderney race. We moored to a buoy but did not go ashore and nobody asked us for a mooring fee!

3rd July 05 – St Peters Port, Guernsey

We had intended to run for the Halford river in Devon but the wind was NW F4 gusting 21 knots, so it would be right on the nose. Instead we left at 0849 and ran down the notorious tidal Swinge to St Peters Port in Guernsey tying up at 1035. A good trip and ran comfortably with a 3m swell at 18/20 knots. The Swinge was a little wild and the mooring 'Grabber', intended to make it easier for Elisha to get ropes around buoys, bounced out of the side deck well and was lost. We did turn to try and find it but decided, as we wildly rolled in the Swinge, that we were wasting our time.



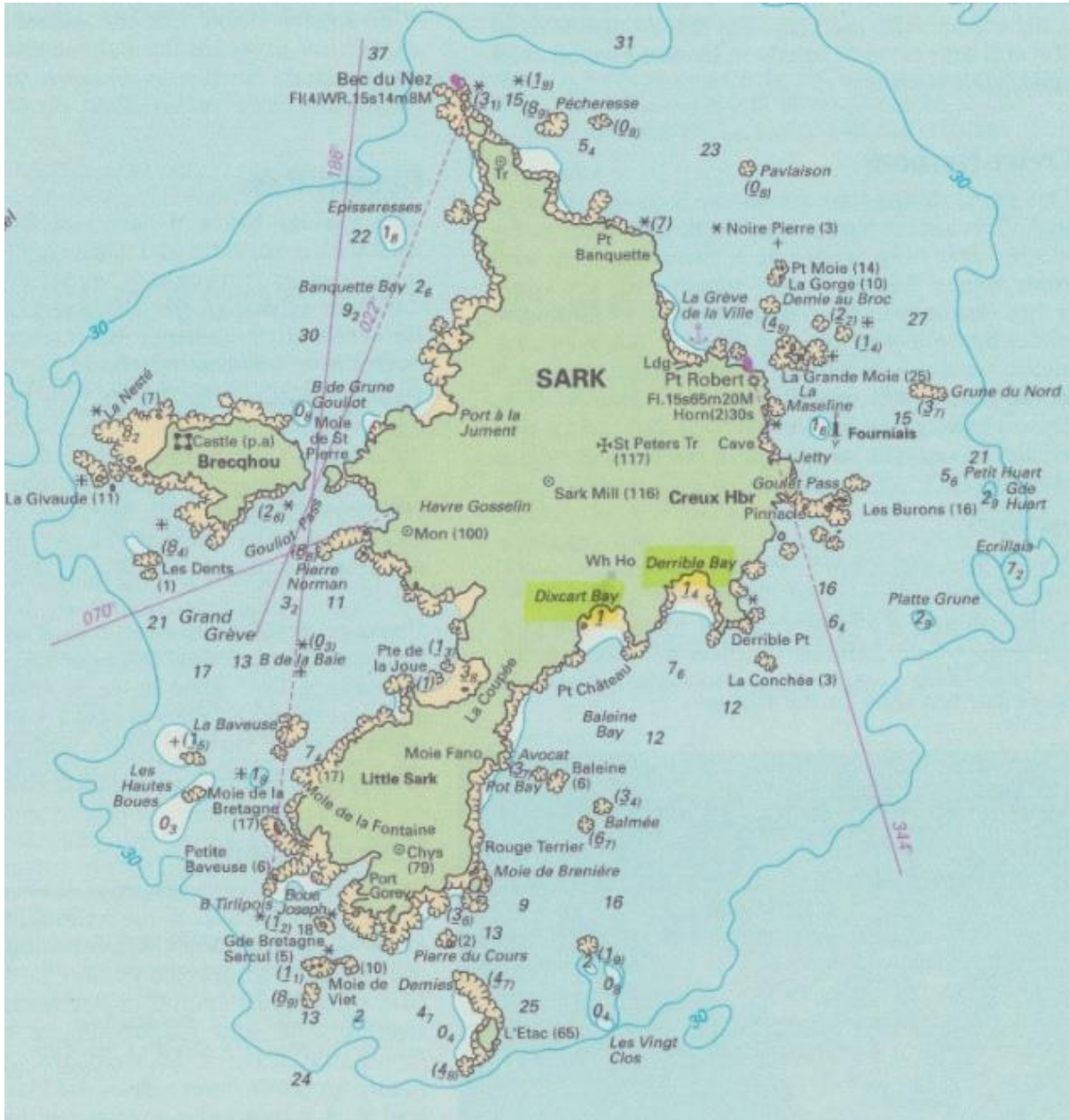
Moored up in St Peter's Port

We refueled at St Peter's Port to be ready when the weather was right and went to Herm on the Ferry to learn the intricate approach for visits in the future.

Mon 4th, Tues 5th, Wed 6th July – St Peters Port

We were stuck in Guernsey for three days with steady NW F5/6 and heavy showers of rain. We walked the cliffs and took buses round the island and explored it which we had not done in depth before. There are much worse places to be stuck than Guernsey!

Thursday 7th July – Dixcart Bay, Sark



The forecast a bit better. Sea slight NW F4 going to NW F3 after lunch, but still on the nose. Bored after three days in harbour we decided to go to the island of Sark and anchored in Derribie Bay. We walked Sark and picnicked and relaxed in utter peace away from the cares of the world. We then moved to Dixcart Bay and anchored for the night, perfectly sheltered from the northerlies.

I heard a text message notification tone from the mobile and later read it. It was from Anne-Marie, our eldest daughter saying “We are all safe. Kathryn was in London and close but safe”. Not having listened to any news for days we were baffled. So I went ashore and climbed up the cliff path to get to the top of Sark where I could get a voice signal. I rang her to hear the terrible news about the bombs. It seemed unreal back in the boat. Floating gently in good shelter in tranquil peace we were brutally reminded of the hatreds of the world.



Anchored in Dixcart Bay, Sark

Friday 8th July- Falmouth

In the morning the wind was NW F4 moderating to F3 and then back to F4. What on earth has happened to the prevailing SW wind? We were making no progress at all.

We decided to set off for Falmouth from Sark. Coming along the south coast of Guernsey the tidal swell at the SW corner and up to the Hanois light was quite bad and I considered aborting the voyage, but we struggled on and the sea state eased. But, of course, as we approached Devon the wind strengthened up again and it was a tedious pound.

We had left Sark at 09:20 and tied up in Mylor Harbour at Falmouth at 16:20. A hard 7 hour slog which greatly increased the fuel consumption but at least we made some progress.

Mylor was nice enough but £22.50 for the night's moorings, and diesel was £0.49 a litre¹ – outrageous. Never Mylor again.

Saturday 9th July – St Marys, Scilly Isles

The wind was NW F3 but going round Lands End it would be directly on our nose, so we chose to go to the beautiful Scilly Isles taking the wind on our starboard stern quarter and heading almost due west. We tied up at St Marys after a nice gentle run of 60 miles.

Sunday 10th July – Scilly Isles

We took the inflatable across to St Agnes and walked and had a beer at the pub. Weather now splendid.

¹ Today, Oct 2018, the price of diesel seems unbelievably low. Complaining about £0.49 a litre just a joke. A well, happy days.

At half tide we crept over the drying banks to Tresco sound and tied up to a buoy. Half tide was too early and the clearance was down to about 6 inches. Three times I anchored and waited for the tide to rise and watched any local boats to try and follow them. So much for my tidal calculations!

We had a lovely dinner in the pub at Tresco and a peaceful night with Cromwell's Castle close at hand and Hangmans Rock with its gallows silhouetted ominously against the sky.



At Mooring St Mary's. Scillies



St Agnes with Cromwells Castle in the Scillies



St Agnes Island, Scillies

Sunday 11th July. - Padstow

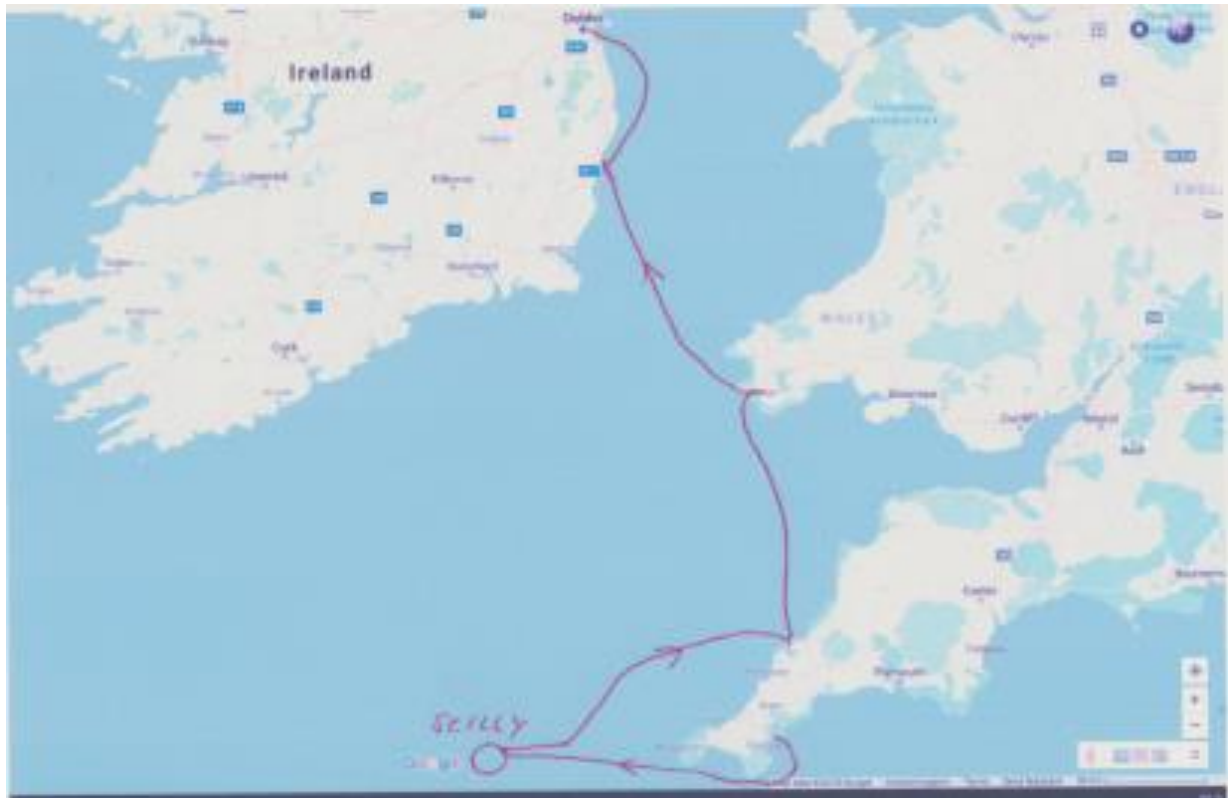
The forecast was wind NE F4. Once again on the bow. Is it Global Warming? Where are my South Westerlies? We left for Padstow estimated 66 nm going north out of Tresco Sound at 0630 to catch the tide for Padstow. We had an uneventful run until the shipping lanes which we turned to cross at right angles. We saw a tug towing an oil rig and shuddered at the consequences of passing between them in poor visibility. Fog banks appeared as we rounded the Longships and Cape Cornwall. Nasty tide and the fog gradually faded. I never seem to learn that all headlands are nasty if you don't get the tide right!



Rafted up in Padstow

As we ran up the North Cornish Coast we saw Dolphins and then a whole shoal of over a dozen Basking Sharks with their great black slow moving fins. Elisha's constant cry of 'Rocks, Rocks' was replaced by 'Sharks, Sharks'.

We rafted up in the inner Harbour at Padstow at 09:50, actual distance 68.81 nm.



Tuesday 12th July – Milford Haven

We filled up with Diesel at Padstow and set off for Milford Haven. At last I felt we were getting into unknown waters. We left at 0845 arriving in Milford Haven, Dale Bay just inside the entrance, at 12:15 having covered about 70 nm, and moored to an empty floating pontoon.

The tiny sailing club was shut but we had soup and a beer ashore. Although Dale Bay was nice and Elisha wanted to stay longer, the weather was good and I was anxious to get on and try to make up some lost time.

Wednesday 13th July- Arklow, Irish Coast

We left at 15:25 with a NE F2 wind and headed for Arklow on the Irish East coast where we arrived at 19:00 a trip of 89 nm. We saw a flock of Puffins which fled in alarm. We saw another tug pulling an oil rig and the high speed ferry to Ireland.

Half way across I saw the instruments start to fail on the Starboard engine. The voltage went, the rev counter, engine hours etc. I shut the engines down and did a check. There was no sign of any oil or water leakage and oil/water levels were OK. I started up again and all came on. One of those intermittent problems that will be the devil to trace, but worrying so far from land.

I had been coming to terms with my electronic Raymarine C80 Chart Plotter and got careless. You just put the cursor over where you want to go. Press 'Goto Cursor' and follow the line! Up till now I had entered the co-ordinates but this time I used 'GoTo' the cursor. Problem was I had put the cursor off the wrong headland! We identified the Arklow Bank LANBY¹ but as I closed the waypoint I became convinced all was not well. Back to basics and a bit of visual recognition and was relieved if a bit ashamed of myself when we finally rounded in between the piers of Arklow's narrow entrance.

Arklow was a shabby little place with a brand new tiny Marina, paid for by EU money, which we squeezed into. We found ourselves a cheerful dinner in an Irish pub. Elisha was sad

¹ LANBY stands for Large Automatic Navigation Buoy. They sport RADAR reflectors and other electronics.



Viking Ship in Dun Laoghaire

we had not stayed longer in Milford Haven and I sympathized as it had been very attractive compared with Arklow.

Thursday 14th July – Dun Laoghaire, Nr Dublin

Forecast was NE F2 so we left Arklow for Dun Laoghaire (Pronounced Dun Leary). We went inside the Arklow Bank and so were close to the headlands, each with its tidal effect, and called the Harbour Master for permission to enter which he cheerfully gave. A combined clubs regatta was on and very colourful all the little sail boats looked. Dun Laoghaire was another gigantic Victorian Naval Base, reminiscent of Portland, and designed as the base for the British Irish Sea fleet. The Marina inside is very new and very expensive but with every facility you can think of.

Rapid Transit trains to Dublin Centre make it a very good base. We called on the Royal St George Yacht Club in the magnificent Victorian building where we were made welcome and ate superbly well for very little money. High ceilings, huge chandeliers and oil paintings of stern gentlemen with whiskers looking out to sea. All this in Republican Ireland! I was told a few club flags from British days still exist and are highly valued. Sometimes they are hoisted when the vessel clears Irish Republican waters. The club does not fly any British flags having been warned by the IRA that to do so would invite bombs.

Friday 15th July - Dun Laoghaire, Nr Dublin

We got up early and sadly got a taxi to the airport for the flight to Southampton so that I could do a week's work and try to keep us solvent.

Sunday 24th July - Dun Laoghaire

We arrived back to be collected at Dublin Airport by Georgie Carter and her Fiancé Pete (they are now married), from our family of Australian cousins, who ran us to Dun Laoghaire and had lunch with us. It was blowing F7 NE (again!) and the sea was very rough so we stayed in marina.

I feel I am getting used to the boat now and I am even beginning to make sense of the Radar.

Monday 25th July - Dun Laoghaire

Much nicer weather this morning but wind still strongish. Forecast to Clogher Head was F3/4 NE so again on the nose.

Checked engines and no problems. Oil in both just 1/8 inch below full. We decided to have a day in Dublin. So we took an open top bus tour, drank Guinness and enjoyed ourselves. All these streets called after terrorists annoy me a bit and the 'Spike' seems a poor substitute for Nelson's Colum; but the Irish individually, as usual, are very amiable.



Georgie, Robert & Elisha in Dun Laoghaire

Tuesday 26th July – Strangford Lough

We had a call from Russell O'Neil¹, an old business friend living in Donaghadee, Northern Ireland, and a keen sailor who was going to be at Portaferry in Strangford Lough to meet us.

The forecast was wind F3, dropping to F2, NE of course. HW Tide for the, very tidal, Strangford entrance was 16:50 BST and as good as any so we decided to press on. We fuelled up with 540 litres of diesel and left at 11:24 with an estimated 70 nm to Strangford entrance.

We ran round Ireland's Eye and on North. It was bumpy at first but steadily settled into a beautiful day and we ran until the Mountains of Mourne came into view before stopping the engines to drift for a sandwich and beer.

Approaching Strangford entrance we identified and left to our port side St Patrick's Rock. We went cautiously up the channel to Portaferry. The local hazards are the many Pladdys, areas of drying rock. We got another call from Russell who was very worried that we might not be able to cope with the tide which streams through the pontoons at Portaferry and was running strongly.

He thought we might be swept onto other boats. As we approached the entrance we got all the fenders out and the boat was festooned so we could bounce off anything. We did not want to arrive in Northern Ireland with old friends watching and demolish local boats.

Actually it was not bad and we made a neat entrance. The channel is a tight dogleg with a drying rock: if you don't do it right the ebb tide sweeps you onto it.

Had not seen Russel for about 15 years and he has gone grey! Great welcome from him and Dennis who had Russell's 20 year old 32' Westerly, Miss Molly, moored up to meet us.

Strangford is apparently a Viking word meaning Strong Fjord, strong referring to the tides.

¹ Poor Russell, who worried about us so much, died in March 2008. Progressive cancer had taken his tongue, his larynx and finally he died, unable to talk. If ever a man smoked and drank himself to death it was Russell but a kinder man it would be difficult to find.



Strangford Lough Reefs – or Pladdys

Thursday 28th July

Portaferry was a very nice little place. Strong tides everywhere including inside Strangford Lough itself where they run through the liberally strewn rocks.

We worked our way up what seemed an intricate route given by Russell through islands and rocks and Pladdys through Ringhaddy and passed Miss Molly at Russell's mooring.

Russell had insisted on lending us his chart of Strangford which is essential. Tucked up at



Down Cruising Club Clubhouse – Lightship PETREL

the pontoon at Down Cruising Club old lightship 'PETREL' at Ballydorn. Electricity and water were free though a donation is welcome! About £10 seem to be acceptable. Fuel is available from the stern of the lightship as well. The lightship bar is open at weekends but sadly we missed it. We were made very welcome by Brian Smith, Hon Sec of Down Cruising Club.

We ate last night at 'Daft Eddies' pub on the veranda in superb sun and warmth. Friday forecast is NE F6 with rain so, smack on the nose and easterly. This guaranteed very nasty seas at Strangford entrance. So we decided not to go.

Friday 27th July – Strangford Lough

We stayed alongside as planned in driving rain and sluicing tides. Wind was F6 to F7 decreasing to F5 to F6 during the day. Later after lunch in Daft Eddies, we set off taking the route down the centre of the Lough to Portaferry. It was surprisingly rough with the wind on the port quarter and pladdies all around. Russell was horrified when he heard. He had never tried the centre and had given us the 'safe' route.

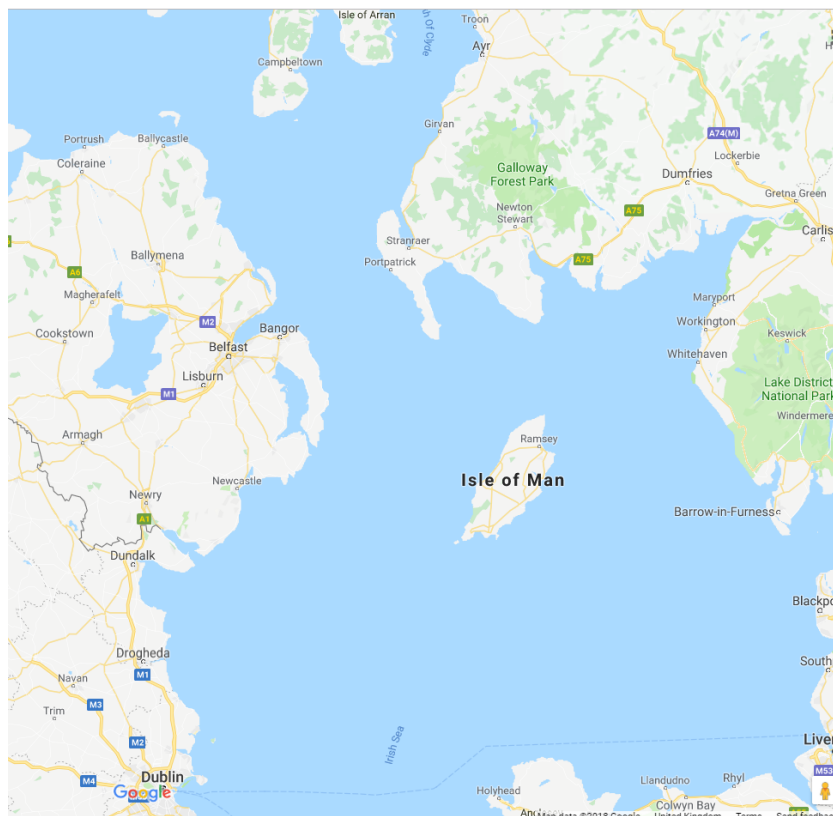
We moored up in Portaferry for the night and hoped the weather would improve.

Saturday 30th July - Bangor

Forecast NE F4 again! Cloudy with rain. I heard a Coastguard forecast saying F3/4 dropping overnight and decided to go. We routed through Donaghadee Sound to Bangor. About 35 nm.

Very steep seas off Strangford Lough entrance and a weary slog to Donaghadee Sound. To top it all the Auto Pilot failed and I had to steer correcting all the way. It was ages before I found out what had happened.

We met Russell at the fantastic Royal Ulster Yacht Club for lunch. He took us on a tour showing with pride the toilet that had been built especially for the Queen's visit years ago. Her Majesty could not be expected to use the usual facilities. "Of course," He said, "It is just a gesture because we all know Royalty does not defecate." Then he marched me up to the Admiralty Chart shop to make sure I spent £100 on Pilots and extra charts for the Hebrides. And me trying to economise. He was really worried about us knowing the waters himself.

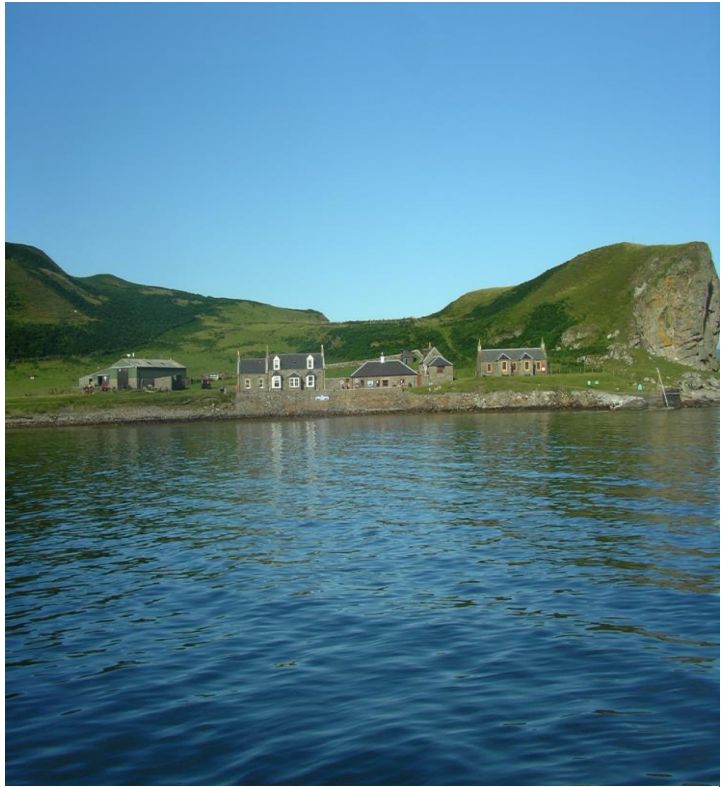


Sunday 31st July – Sanda Island

Forecast F2 NW! Now that's better. Left at 0912 for Scotland aiming for Sanda Island off the tip of the Mull of Kintyre. We anchored in Sanda at 1045, an easy 40 nm run at 28 knots. A lovely anchorage with a sandy clay bottom and great holding. There is one mooring buoy laid by the owner which was taken by the only other boat. The yacht left later and we moved to the mooring so that I had less to worry about at night.

Great lunch and dinner in the Byron Darnton Tavern and Dick Gannon made us very welcome. The Byron Darnton was an American Liberty ship wrecked on the island in 1945. We walked the island and pondered the extraordinary Stevenson lighthouse.

Dick bought the island in 1990 and has worked restoring buildings since. He has done a fantastic job. The Inn and accommodation have been open for 2 years now.



The Pub on Sanda Island



Moored off Sanda Island

Monday 1st August – Gigha Island

Weather NW F2/3 becoming NW F3/4. We decided to head for Gigha (Pronounced Giah) leaving the Mull of Kintyre to our starboard (East). We had planned to go through the Crinan Canal but general input from Russell was we could not do it with just the two of us and we had to see Gigha. He was always concerned that we were short crewed.

We left Sanda with regret at 0940 and had a predictably bumpy ride round the Mull of Kintyre, but this died away and we found ourselves with a flat calm as we ran up the coast to the west of the Mull.

We moored to a buoy in Gigha bay and thought it marvelous. Hot, calm, sub tropical gardens and loads of seals. I explored the rocks and admired the seals in the cool of the evening in the dinghy. Elisha had not known that seals sing! But they did that evening.

Gigha is in the news as it has been bought from the German landlord by the people with a loan and grants from the Scottish Parliament.



Stevenson Lighthouse on Sanda Island

Tuesday 2nd August - Craobh Marina

Wind S/SW F3 in the harbour, astern for a change.

We had a lovely run up the Sound of Jura past the famous Gulf of Corryvreckan reputed to have sucked boats down in its whirlpools, and left Shuna Island to Port to run up Loch Shuna to Craobh Marina (pronounced Creuve).

Just beautiful, tucked in the hills miles from anywhere. We were stuck there for a couple of days with a mild gale blowing. No mobile signal unless you climbed a hill to the, inevitable, War Memorial, and no working coin box: BT won't fix them anymore they tell me. We walked 3 hrs across the peninsula to Ardfert Marine in the Loch Craignish and had lunch, a long way and stretched the legs.



Semi Tropical Garden in Gigha

I also pondered the auto-pilot failure. It was tedious and tiring to cruise with manual steering, the course needing constant correction.

I located and downloaded to my laptop the Commissioning Guide for the Autopilot from the Raymarine website using the marina internet. Having no printer I set out to copy the manual from the screen.

I worked my way through the settings and wondered if they really should be showing as a displacement boat with max speed 8 knots, among other odd settings!

Illumination came, at last. Back in Strangford I had taken the chance to fit a divider in a chart locker while tied up. I had a Black & Decker battery powered drill and bored the holes and fitted a neat shelf. Looks good, works fine.

What I had not realised was that Jeanneau had fitted the fluxgate compass and control box for the Auto Pilot on the other side of the plywood locker end I was working in! The magnetic flux from the drill had just wiped out the settings! It didn't know what boat it was in or what hemisphere as far as I could tell.

I got most of the settings done but now we needed 'sea trials'. "You need a calm day with

no wind or tide and plenty of space.” Burbled the manual. I considered the tides around the nearby Corryvreckan and looked at the raging seas over the breakwater with plenty of rocks and thought this could take some time.

During this time I studied our next move. Russell had been very keen we do the ‘sleigh ride’ through the Sound of Cuan. This narrow dog-legged straight between the islands of Luing and Seil sounded grim in the pilot books, suggesting the force of the tide could put you on the waiting rocks as you tried to claw your way around the 120 degree change of direction. The heavy seas which could be waiting as you emerged sounded unpleasant too. Russel called it the ‘sleigh ride’ because right at the dog-leg where the tides meet, coming from different directions, a ‘step’ forms which means that the water is suddenly two or three feet lower and you plunge down a level. A yacht can find this very alarming as by this time you are committed you may not be able to turn back against the tide. With our big diesels this wasn’t my main concern. Rather that, with the lack of a keel, we might be swept beam on onto the rocks.

Thursday 5th August

Forecast Westerly F5/6 decreasing F4 later and going NW and going back to F5. We were aiming for Oban which meant threading various islands and going through a stretch of water exposed to the strong westerly wind. I consulted the Marina guys and they thought it would be no problem in ‘a big powerful boat like mine’! You can tell we are heading North. We are a tiddler in the Solent but notable here.

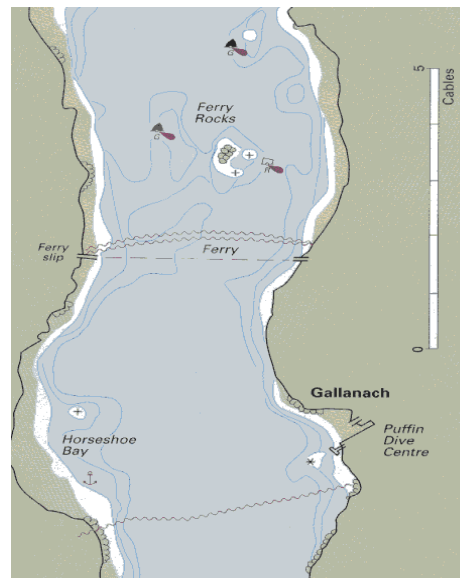
We decided to go. Well alright, I decided to go. But I chickened out of the Sound of Cuan and decided to go south and north around Ardluing Point and up the Sound of Luing. Just out of the Marina we tried ‘sea trials’ in the sound. Given the wind, a little tide and rocks which seemed to be everywhere when you tried to circle I don’t think it was what the makers had in mind. Result not right but certainly better. The sea outside was lumpy but not too bad. Once we cleared Scarba Island though, there were significant waves.

We arrived at Oban through the Sound of Kerrara with its confusing rocks with cardinal buoys on both sides. Approach from the South and you see in front a Green to Port and a Red to Starboard. Leave Green to Starboard and Red to Port and you are OK. Come from the North though and do the same and the Ferry Rocks between the markers will have you. So note the direction of buoyage and think about it! I’m not surprised a steady trickle of people end up on the Ferry Rocks.

Oban was exposed and rough. We pitched around the mooring buoy in the rain and couldn’t land in the dinghy on the nearby shore because of the surf so we sloshed across the harbour in the dinghy to the town pier. Oban was grey and wet and windy and depressing. We had lunch in a cramped pub. Elisha went to the loo when we were ready to go and while I was waiting for her a lady with two fractious small children, obviously tired, could find no seat. I offered her mine as I was ‘just leaving’ and stood up. She gratefully sat her kids down. I stood waiting for Elisha. The lady’s husband appeared and she said to him that I had kindly given her my seat. “Oh did he.” Said the husband glaring suspiciously at me.

We bought some bread and managed to get back aboard from the pitching dingy without getting the bread too wet. There is a pontoon on Kerrara Island on the far side of the harbour but Oban had palled on us so we set off up the Sound of Mull for Loch Aline.

In Robert Louis Stevenson’s Kidnapped David Balfour, having been shipwrecked, finally



Ferry Rocks – Sound of Luing

managed to cross to the mainland by taking the ferry into Lochaline. Loch Aline was beautiful. Sheltered and quiet and we ate on the boat. In the morning we walked along the loch in the rain and were really happy.



Elisha at Tobermory



Beautiful Little Boat in Tobermory

Friday 6th August - Tobermory

We had an easy run up to Tobermory. Unexpectedly picturesque with painted houses and a super anchorage. We moored to a buoy for £12 a night but they have recently added some pontoons with electricity. We walked along the harbour in lovely hilly country. Moored there was quite the prettiest boat I think I have ever seen. A little wooden sailboat in perfect condition. The picture does not do it justice.



At Anchor in Tobermory Harbour – No Spanish Treasure Ship



Looking Down on Tobermory Harbour

Saturday 6th August - Kyleakin

Forecast NW4 going North. We left Tobermory at 1430 and had a fine run round Ardnamurchan Point which entitled us to wear a bunch of heather on the bow I'm told. Past Rhum, Eigg and Muck. Up the Sound of Sleat through the narrows and moored up at Kyleakin where friendly yacht racers urged us to raft up and took our ropes. A strange place with the rusting hulks of the ferries now disused since the bridge to Skye was built.

Sunday 7th August – Portree, Skye

We woke to cold sun. Forecast NNE F4. I checked the engines and we left for Portree, capital of Skye, at 0930. Attempts to pay for the nights mooring were met with amusement by the locals.

There seemed little wind at first and we saw 'Ugoigo2', which we had passed in the Sound of Sleat, ahead of us with another yacht under engine. But as we passed under the Skye Bridge the wind seemed a good F6. This was evidently the effect of funneling down between the mainland and Raasey – right on the nose. Great white crested combers explained why both yachts had turned back. I think they were being drowned in their open cockpits!

We hastily shut the hardtop and slogged grimly on with water coming solid over the boat. But our marvelous hardtop meant we did not get wet. We could maintain no more than 7 knots. The hard worked wipers allowed glimpses of white crested waves and grim black cliffs. I kept reassuring Elisha that we would soon be in shelter and it was just the funneling effect of the sound but we only got some shelter when we turned between Raasey and Scalpay into the Sound of Raasey. I confess I was glued to the Chart Plotter and just hoping the rocks were in the right place. Any attempt to take a visual fix by sticking my head out was promptly rewarded with what seemed like half a ton of freezing water.

We turned into Portree bay and a lovely sheltered harbour opened up with another pretty little town with painted houses. Much nicer than expected and we moored up to a buoy.

We had a great bar dinner in a hotel overlooking the bay where the rooms were £180 a night per person! The Cuillin Mountains formed a backdrop. There is no better scenery.



Anchored in Portree, Skye

Monday 8th August – Loch Maddy

Forecast Little Minch. F3 North becoming cyclonic. Now that's better. We fuelled up and paid the lowest prices since leaving Channel Islands because this is Highland Council fishermen's fuel. 273 litres at 37p a litre which after Bangor at 59p was a great help.

We left Portree for Rona at 1047. Loch a'Bhraige is a magical little inlet, used by the the Admiralty, hard to spot the entrance. We were very unsure we were going the right way. It looked as if we were just heading for rocks until we found the little harbour open up in front of us with a pier and a mooring buoy. The Estate Manager appeared and warned us the weekly supply vessel was due and would use the pier so we moored for lunch to the huge buoy in deep water. Desolate, hilly and beautiful.



Lunch on Rona Island

On to the Outer Hebrides, Loch Maddy in North Uist over the mirror calm but misty Sea of the Hebrides. We stopped and drifted for a bit watching porpoises. Loch Maddy presented a rock strewn entrance and bleak surrounding low hills. "This is Loch Maddy", I announced to Elisha as we skirted various outcrops. "That is because only mad people come here." She said sadly having wanted to spend more time walking in Skye and Rona.

Loch Maddy had little to offer apart from some free mooring buoys. One small shop. A few houses and the scruffiest looking Hotel I've seen in ages. I thought it was derelict, but we found a way in and got some food. There is a ferry pier and when the ferry arrived it stayed the night.



The Misty Hebrides on the Horizon

Russell phoned to say we now had some settled weather and we must go to St Kilda, only 40 miles out towards America. I pointed out that we had to get through the Sound of Harris first, a noted and extremely difficult channel with no proper buoyage. He dismissed this and said if you followed the army markers with care you would be alright but they doubled back on themselves so it was vital to get the sequence right. I was tempted with the opportunity of seeing remote St Kilda, but there was the tricky pilotage of the Sound of Harris followed by 40 miles into the Atlantic. If the wind gets up from the south west the western entrance to the channel to get back becomes difficult and dangerous to enter. I planned the passage with great care.

Tuesday 9th August - Stornaway

The ferry left at 0730. There was a light mist and the air was very damp. Forecast F2 variable. After various attempts at re-calibration I seemed to have finally sorted the auto-pilot as best I can. "It's foggy, lets stay." Said Elisha. "No, it's just morning mist." I said.

We left Loch Maddy entrance to find visibility down to ½ mile. I assured Elisha it would lift soon. Radar is fantastic. I take back what I said at first. Sadly I abandoned idea of attempting the Sound of Harris as too dangerous in the fog and set course for North Harbour in Scalpay in poor visibility. It was a



Shiant Islands

desolate abandoned place with a rusting wreck as a hazard. We anchored and ate.

Not thinking much of Scalpay we left under the new road bridge and set course for the Shiant Islands. The fog had lifted a little but still loomed overhead.

We found the islands with their heads wreathed in mist and went down the sound. We saw nothing of the Green Man reputed to rise from the water and pull sailors to the cold watery depths.

We carried on to Stornoway but the fog got thicker until we could see nothing and were entirely reliant on Radar which identified stationary fishing boats and we trickled miserably along at 6 knots. We got, by Radar overlaid on the Chart Plotter, to within about 50 feet of the marker off Holm Point before we saw it. Turning towards the entrance we heard the foghorn of a big ship under weigh and nervously crept onwards.

The ship, we are certain it was a ferry, passed us to port hooting gloomily. We hooted back but it sounded a weak and unconvincing noise, more like a loud squeak. As we entered the harbour proper the fog thinned and we made our way carefully up past the ferry berth to the inner harbour and new pontoons. As we rounded the final pier we were met by a large seal swimming strongly towards us. Worried we might run him (or her) over I put the engines in neutral but he came right up to us.



Seals in Stornoway are not shy

By the time we got to the pontoon there were about four big seals. We moored up while the seals snorted around us seeking fish. It seems they thought we were a fishing boat coming in and greet all boats in this way, expressing disapproval if not fed.

I decided that I had to go back home to attend to some work matters and that Stornoway was as good a place to leave the boat as any. We flew from the old NATO airbase, just five miles outside Stornoway with a tiny modern air terminal, to Glasgow and caught a flight to Southampton. No question it's a lot faster than by sea!

.....

Saturday 20th August – Camusglashlan Bay and Ullapool

We arrived back at Stornoway airport at 1420 and went straight to the boat. At 1530 we left the harbour bound for Ullapool.

We knew my brother was staying in Ullapool and my nephew Neil was at our Croft north of the Summer Isles in Camusglashlan Bay. We could not get anyone on the mobile and wondered if they were all away for the day. As we approached Priest Island the weather was so good we decided to take the opportunity and diverted to Camusglashlan Bay. We ran to the Summer



Wester Ross from the Minch

Isles, inside the island of Tanera Mor, past Dorney and the unnamed islands we had named after our children, inside Mullagrah, past treacherous Reiff point and the tall black cliffs of Meoul, and, scarcely able to believe we had actually got there in our own boat, turned to starboard into the Camusglashlan Bay. There is no road to Camusglashlan and all was deserted.

We dropped anchor off the sandy beach in the cold clear green water in flat calm. All these waters were so familiar to me from my childhood.

I landed Elisha in the dinghy who went up to the croft and surprised them all. Neil, Keith, two of their friends Chris and John. David and Wendy were all there and thought Elisha had walked from Dorney. They had not got a mobile signal and were astonished at Elisha's sudden appearance. They all came down to the bay where I ferried them out to the boat and opened two bottles of cold Champagne we had brought all the way to celebrate the fact that we had made Camusglashlan.

We went back through the Summer Isles to Ullapool and anchored for the night some way from the crowded fishing and ferry jetty. We met again with David and Wendy who kindly treated us to a convivial meal

Late that evening and very weary Elisha and I got into the wet dinghy and after some trouble finally found the boat again in the pitch dark. Considering we had left Southampton Airport, changed at Glasgow for Stornoway, crossed the Minch to Camusglashlan and then gone to Ullapool it had been a very long day and we sank into a deep sleep..



Anchoring in Camusglashlan Bay



Camusglashlan Bay



My Brother David and his wife Wendy with Elisha

Sunday 21st August -

I was wakened by Elisha at 0300 saying we were aground. I crawled out of our bunk and went to look and, sure enough, in the dark, a hard muddy ridge rose up right beside the boat. It was now raining cold rain, the weather had changed. We were not actually aground but were very close to it. I had anchored, at high tide, quite close to the drying mud but thought I was clear. The wind had changed and we had swung awful close. As the tide was now rising I decided not to flounder around in the dark and rain and went back to sleep. When I woke the forecast was S F4/5 with rain and cloud. The forecast for Monday was W F5 going SW F6 in the afternoon with a severe gale on the way. So I was going to get my south westerlies, but not as I had wanted them.

I got a call from Russell who watched our progress with concern. Really bad weather was forecast, where were we? Where did we plan to tuck up for the storm?



At Anchor in Ullapool Bay, Loch Broom



The 'Summer Only' Pontoon in Lochinver

I'm not sure Russell was ever convinced we were safe out on our own. We raised the anchor, which had about a hundredweight of mud and kelp round it which had to be cut off, and left Ullapool. We cruised through the Summer Isles to Old Dorney, a marvelous little inlet providing safe shelter, where we anchored and had lunch. Then we left and went on to Lochinver where we planned to sit out the gale.

The weather was good but the rain came again as we approached Lochinver and then poured for the rest of the day. I had chosen Lochinver as a good haven. Anchoring at Ullapool was too exposed and Dorney was too narrow and crowded and there we would be relying entirely on our anchor.

At Lochinver we moored to the council summer pontoon and admired Suilven mountain, majestic in its rounded bulk, as it loomed over the little town.

We met Janet and Harold Longstaff who turned out to be related to Mrs Rex, the Laird of Coigeach, and they came for a drink on the boat. Harold was 82 and had served in a mountain battery in Afghanistan and was a character. Janet was 20 years younger, his second wife, and as Skipper ran the ship. They had come down on a borrowed boat and had decided to wait out the storm in Lochinver like us. We were the only two pleasure boats in harbour.



Monday 22nd August - Lochinver

It is Annabel's birthday, she is 12. We rang and sung Happy Birthday. She will soon be a young lady, and what a beautiful one.

We fuelled up with 440 litres of diesel at 35.99p + 5% VAT for only £166 as it was Highland Council for fishermen. The pontoon berth was £15.27 for two nights. No water or



Stormbound in Lochinver



Storm F11 in the sheltered Lochinver Harbour

electricity but at that price I'm not complaining.

The forecast for Wednesday was now a F11 Storm, no mere gale, so we decided this was as good a place as any to wait it out. We went walking in the mountains and the river and scenery were marvelous.

Preparing for the storm we put out extra fenders and doubled up the ropes. We went for a return drink on the Longstaff's boat and we all wondered if the double mooring ropes and extra fenders were really needed. "Feel silly in the morning if there's no storm." Said Janet.

Wednesday 24th August - Lochinver

No need to feel silly. Storm was F11. The pontoon was awash and I thought it might break away as it formed an alarming angle to the shore and the sections heaved and bucked madly, held in place only by anchors. The wind was colossal.

Harold, Janet and crew abandoned ship at first light, crawling up the pontoon on hands and knees, roped together and taking turns round mooring cleats on way.

I got Elisha ashore with difficulty, holding tight onto her, and parked her comfortably in the hotel. I went back to the boat to rig even more mooring lines ready for use. I sat in the cockpit with a knife ready to cut the ropes to the pontoon if the section broke off. I reckoned I could get round to the inner harbour and against a fishing boat if need be but I was not going to watch my boat drifting off tied to a section of pontoon.

The storm blew all day and you forget what force nature can produce. In the harbour, sheltered by the breakwater, big grey white crested waves raced across and broke right over the inner breakwater.

Thursday 25th August – Badachro, Gairloch

It looks better and wind down to W F3/4. We left Lochinver and set off for Dorney to meet Kathryn and Diane Ross. It was rough up to Coigeach and once round the point there were

huge residual sea swells as we went down past Camusglashlan Bay. There was no question of entering the bay again. There were enormous white breakers half way up the black cliffs. Just mountains of white water. We could not better 11 knots. Once we were past Reiff and inside the island of Mullagrah it was fine.

We moored to a fisherman's buoy in sheltered Old Dorney sound and took the dinghy ashore. We were met by Kathryn, Daniel and Diane and had lunch at the Fuarin Inn.

After lunch we sadly set off heading South on our way home. A long slow slog to Gairloch and into Badachro where we had dinner in the pub. Some of the moorings had dragged in the storm and we were advised to move but it was all free courtesy the pub. During the night we had wild squalls of wind with heavy rain and were glad we had taken advice and our mooring was secure!



Moored in Old Dorney Harbour

Friday 26th August - Knoydart

We set off for Knoydart in heavy seas, SW 4/5. After leaving Gairloch we headed towards Rona to seek some shelter in its lee, and later Scalpay, but were still very glad to get to the shelter of Kylesku. As well as the big seas we kept getting blinding storms of heavy rain and



Anchored at Knoydart in Loch Nevis

again blessed the hardtop.

We stopped at the pontoon at Kylesku. The hotel was not serving food as they were expecting a coach party so we got some food in a store and ate on the boat before setting off again. Nice and sheltered down through the narrows after Loch Alsh but after that the head seas slammed us about, SW F4/5. All the way up the wind blew from the North and all the way back it blew from the South!

We crept battered into Loch Nevis and cruised up to Inverie in Knoydart. A rolling sea and a free mooring so we resigned ourselves to an uncomfortable night.

We went ashore and walked up into the mountains. We took dinner at the Old Forge which was crammed with huge hearty walkers in full kit. It was noisy and cheerful. Scallops and stew and plenty beer.

Inverie has a short strip of single track tarred road running along the shoreline but no access at all by road from outside. You walk in over the mountains, or boat in! All supplies were brought by a small local ferry from Mallaig and there was a sign on the Old Forge saying "Drinks any Time". Everything is left open as there is no point in stealing, you can't get away. There are no roads for drunken drivers. The ferry will let them know in advance of any 'officials' on board and the few boats that call can be seen miles away so there is little point in trying to enforce 'closing time'.

The wind dropped so we had a lovely calm night with just a few showers of rain. Batteries all charged up now (the lights had run them very flat at Gairloch) so we could use the illuminate the boat for a hot drink when we got aboard. We listened to the drama on VHF radio as someone was rescued by the lifeboat outside Mallaig.



Knoydart in Loch Nevis. Only Land Approach is over the mountains.

Saturday 27th August - Dunstaffnage

Rain and cloud. Wind about F2 SW but no forecast as surrounding mountains killed GPRS. We planned to anchor for lunch inside Oronsay in Loch Drumbuie and then the marina at

Dunstaffnage north of Oban. Would have liked to try for Rhum but poor visibility made it pointless.

Another rough day. A very rough run to and round Ardnamurchan Point with the wind strongly blowing us on. Wind SW F4/5. Just off the lighthouse we got a rope, and a lobster pot I think, round the starboard propeller with a big thump and I wished I was not so close in on a lee shore to the ragged cliffs. After pitching about with me life-lined to the stern platform getting soaked we seemed to clear the rope and whatever it was tied to and carried on with crossed fingers. We had some vibration so I wanted to check properly as soon as possible.

We got into Loch Drumbuie which is a beautiful but a tricky entrance and anchored. I tilted up the outdrives checked and the props from the dingy. The rope seemed to have mostly gone but there was a big dent in the forward edge of the starboard stainless steel DuoProp. I struggled to straighten out the dent a bit with a big adjustable spanner as a lever with partial success. The forecast was stronger winds and I well believed the Pilot Book that you could get bottled up in Drumbuie for days by the weather, so we lunched and went on down the Sound of Mull to Dunstaffnage north of Oban. A Marina! Civilisation. Electricity and water. And of course not so civilised charges. Nice but main road quite close. We ate in the Frog. It was expensive and back to foreign waitresses. We walked out to the old castle built on a rock, it must have been strong in its day.

Sunday 28th August - Dunstaffnage

Glad we tucked up. Forecast 30 knots SW, F6 going F7. We were very sheltered and a good place to leave the boat for winter. An amazingly wet day with driving rain and wind from the west.

We took a taxi into Oban and ate in the old Caledonian Hotel. A Huge Cruise Ship was anchored in the bay and parties of Orientals from the ship trudged around Oban in the wind and rain. Their ship kept disappearing in the murk!

Monday 29th August – Crinan

Forecast W F6 dropping to W F5 by midday.

We went to Oban for fuel to get Highland Council prices as the price at the Marina was plain silly. Apparently most people pay the Marina price for the convenience and not having to go to Oban Quay and climb up the rusty seaweed draped ladder. They were very amiable. We took 455 litres so price matters.

We went back down Kerrara Sound, the other side of the Ferry Rocks, which was OK. But as we cleared the western entrance we were head into the wind again. We had to slow right down to less than 1 knots and were overtaken by C-Jem, a 40 foot semi displacement boat just right for the conditions. She looked magnificent as she forged through the sea with towering sheets of white water completely hiding her at times.

It became evident that she, like us, was heading for the Sound of Cuan. I had chickened out coming north but felt we could not miss it this time. So we headed for Russell's 'Sleight Ride'. The approach was a bit alarming with no obvious entrance and white water on rocks close on each side, but I followed C-Jem. As we closed I became sure he was too far to the north, so I stopped following him, and set my own course. He suddenly altered course sharply to the south and followed me so I think I was correct. Like all the passages that sound so alarming in the pilot book it was not as bad as I'd feared and the tide was not running too fast.

Nevertheless it is a narrow sound with a sharp, almost 90 degree turn which has rocks on both sides as well as directly ahead. A neat fast passage saving some distance and I was pleased with us for having got through, though the heart did beat a bit faster.

We turned south and headed for Crinan. Now that we were sheltered we could get to our 26 knots cruising and passed 'C-Jem' pounding along at about 16 knots as we headed down Loch Shuna.

We ran down past the Corryvreckan to the Grey Dogs Rocks, also known as the Little Corry-vreckan, another spot only a cable across reputed to be worse than the Corryvreckan itself in certain conditions. When we went through it was just like Hurst on a bad day.

We locked into Crinan. I misjudged the cross current and bumped the wall entering the lock quite hard, but no damage that I could see. You would have thought I could steer a boat by now.

A beautiful basin with the most expensive, but also the best, bar meal we have had, looking over the sound.



Crinan, Canal Basin with 'The Vital Spark' from the Film.



Waiting for a lock gate in Crinan Canal

The old 'puffer', the Vital Spark, rusty and forgotten lay in the basin as you can see in the picture. The one used to make the Para Handy series.

Tuesday 30th August - Ardrishaig

I felt, contrary to advice, that Elisha and I together could get us through the canal but, as you have to work the locks yourself, it would be terribly slow and awful hard work. The Crinan Canal sea lock office gave me a couple of numbers and I got Bruce Robertson to help. We were up at 0700 and were into lock 13 at 0830. Bruce met us at the first manual lock and did all the locks for us for £40. I don't think we could have done without him and he was well worth the money. Even with him we were both tired by the time we got to Ardrishaig what with manoeuvring and Elisha hurling ropes and being stung by a wasp. We got to Ardrishaig at 1500 hours with no lunch and all we could find was a sandwich. It took us 7 hours which was not bad. Crinan is a lovely canal and I'm sorry we did not spend an extra night there but now pressing on as time, and season, running out.

We locked out of Ardrishaig and went to East Loch Tarbert, another of Russell's 'must go' places. Great place if you miss the rocks at the entrance and they have a pontoon with power. We had a hot dinner with Elisha falling asleep over it and then back to the boat.

Wednesday 31st August – Sanda Island

Forecast SE F2. What a nice change. We walked up to Tarbert Castle, extended by Robert the Bruce, then plundered for stones to build Victorian Tarbert. Great view over the loch.

We left for a fairly easy run to Sanda Island. Porpoises, fog and then rain. As we approached Sanda we got very heavy rain and thunder. Once again the yacht on the sole mooring buoy moved off at dusk and we upped anchor and tied on. Ashore for dinner and the faithful Yamaha 2 hp outboard began to play up. Left tipped up on the dinghy, endlessly soaked



Sanda Bay Again

with rain and sea, I could not blame it. I promised it a cover for Christmas but it still would not start.

We had dinner and re acquainted with Dick. He now had three cheerful Australians working with him and we bought them a drink and chatted.

I was worried about the slight vibration caused by the dent in the propeller gained at Ardnamurchan and tried to straighten it out again with an adjustable spanner. Hard work with no purchase so not very successful. Doing this I realised the anodes had gone again. The rate of cathodic action is awful. At this rate the boat needs to come out for a new set every two months.

Thursday 1st September - Bangor

Now it is Autumn and we can expect the weather to deteriorate. By 0300 a Force 5 from NW and we were thrown about at the mooring. Another boat came in in the dark and anchored. We could see his anchor light but otherwise pitch dark. I was just getting back to sleep when there was a crash. I leapt up with the torch but could see nothing in the wind and rain but racing white capped waves. The GPS said I was OK and depth was 3 metres. I discovered I had left our anchor a little loose in it's cradle and it had been flung up and down in the pitching.

In retrospect we should have carried on 40 nm to Bangor as the wind was forecast but we wanted to see Sanda again.

The Byron Darnton Tavern is named after the American Liberty Ship wrecked off the lighthouse. She ran aground in March 1946, broke in two and was a total loss.

Dick now has a light on the end of his Jetty after a man with too much drink fell in face down in the dark trying to get into a dinghy and floated into the away. They had an awful job finding him and getting him out.

This evening a boat with a flaky outboard and some youngsters from the mainland eventually set off in the fog and the engine went. They drifted in the fog occasionally getting the engine going again and finally arrived back at Sanda Island cold and very frightened having gone right round the island.

The seals sang mournfully in the evening. Elisha at first did not believe the weird noise was seals or that they could sing. But it was and they can.

The NW F4 blew on our starboard quarter giving us a lovely run to Bangor in 1½ hours. We met up with Russell and two other old friends, Andrew and Richard Brightman. We had both lunch and dinner at the Royal Ulster Yacht Club and excellent it was. Russell brought his girlfriend, the charming Margot who we met for the first time.

We had 'Elisha' lifted out by B J Marine in Bangor. We got them to do an oil change and change all the oil and fuel filters. Although they were very helpful I came to regret it later in Dublin when I discovered the spotty lad who was given the job had



Lifted out at Bangor but still some rope from Ardnamurchan

allowed all the oil from the filters to flow into the bilges creating a horrible mess underneath the engines which is the devil to get at. Old story. If you want a proper job – do it yourself.

I took the propellers off myself and changed all the anodes. I smoothed the dent in the propeller properly having borrowed their workshop anvil and it looks good. It cured the vibration. There was still a piece of the lobster pot rope round the prop which I kept as a souvenir.

Friday 2nd September - Ardglass

Forecast South F4 with heavy cloud veils. We went on to Donaghadee where we squeezed in beside the pier steps and met up with Russell and Margot. Had some wine and went to Margot's house which is fantastic, just on the sea, and had some more wine.

Then we left for Ardglass, unwisely, into a Southerly F4. Sea was OK at first but built into a really nasty confused sea as we approached the exit from Strangford Lough. Most unpleasant. We crept into Ardglass having done no more than 8 knots much of the way through a complicated twisting entrance and I made a mess of mooring.

The wine I had drunk at Donaghadee was catching up with me. I was desperate for a pee but the motion had been too violent to relieve myself. In the shelter of the very tight and narrow harbour channel into Phennick Cove Marina at Ardglass. I tried to grab a bucket and drifted in the cross wind onto the starboard buoy in full view of people in the marina. Extracting myself and thanking god I had not hit a rock. I went round and bow on into a berth just to stop for a moment with Elisha asking why we were going in bow on. A man in a big displacement cruiser started telling me I should turn round and reverse in. Having used the bucket with enormous relief I backed out and turned round being blown off in the process. The man in the big boat shouted to use the engines, not the bow thrusters. Elisha leapt ashore with the stern rope but instead of making fast kept trying to pull the boat in. The man from the power boat came round to help convinced he was rescuing us. I threw him the bow rope but Elisha had not put it under the rails and so I had to go forward and take it back and re pass it being blown off all the time. I thanked him for his help and got a lecture about how he had been doing it for 30 years and I should not have gone in forwards first and I should have used the engines. At least you are safe now he said condescendingly. I gritted my teeth and said nothing. I did not point out he had shaft drives in a semi displacement boat with a keel which is quite different. He probably had not been drinking wine in Donaghadee either. I was black humiliated and silent for a long time.

Saturday 3rd September - Ardglass

No fuel at Ardglass unless you arrange a tanker which needed two days notice. I reckoned Dublin 50 nm from Carlingford and we had 5 hours cruising leaving 25% I estimated, so pretty good. Carlingford Lough for fuel and lunch seemed a good idea.

Sunday 4th September – Ardglass

Stayed at Ardglass in strong winds, F5/6 SE and a horrible sea outside. What a poor grim little border town it is. No petrol was dispensed at filling stations unless paid for in advance due to the prevalence of 'drive offs' who just nipped across the border into the Republic and were safe.

Monday 5th September - Dublin

Wind eased to SE F2/3, sea quite smooth but thick fog. After some agonising about whether to go we clawed our way out at 1100. I had rung Dublin and it was clear there. We ran for 2 hours through really thick fog at 20 knots. The radar was incredible and we saw all the seabirds and fishing floats and only three fishing boats, all stationery but invisible in the fog. Yes, reading this I too would have said it was mad and dangerous, but it did not seem like that. There were no navigational hazards and the Radar showed just everything, even alarmed seagulls taking off in front of us.



Elisha in Dublin on Liffey

Half an hour short of Dublin we burst out of the fog bank into bright sun with a clear sky! It was really hot. We looked back and the bank of fog was like a huge dirty grey cliff rising out of the sea. We went up the Liffey, under the opening bridge with permission, and to the town moorings in the heart of Dublin where we spent the night. Another Guinness or two and a bit of shopping.

Tuesday 6th September – Milford Haven

We trickled down the river to Poolbeg Marina for fuel, new and keen for business. The secretary, Paul, was very friendly and fuelled us up with 500 litres. He insisted on us having a free coffee and urged us to pass word around this was the ideal Dublin Marina.

We moved to Dun Laoghaire (Pronounced Dun Leary) for a short stay being determined to eat again at the Royal Irish Yacht Club. It was well worth it and a great lunch.

We set off on the long run to Wexford down past Arklow past the offshore banks. At Wexford it was low and tide we could not find our way in! We followed the markers which started way out at sea. As it shallowed and the shore got closer we saw breakers on each side on the sand banks. Still no sign of Wexford. When depth got to 1.5 m beneath the keel and dropping with banks around and dead ahead we decided this was not for us and retreated. Low Water Neaps at Wexford was 1522 and we arrived at 1630. Maybe we should have waited off for the tide to rise.

Well clear back in safe water we debated the next move. There was only Rosslare but that was exclusively for ferries with nowhere for yachts. Since the evening looked OK we decided, the hell with it, and ran across St Georges Channel for Milford Haven. Another 60 nm to Hole Bay and we did it in 2.5 hours making 28 knots much of the way in clear weather and that included altering course to cross the shipping lane at right angles.

We arrived at 1945 and moored to Dale Pontoon in the middle of the bay as before. So 120 nm in an afternoon. We had left Dun Laoghaire at 1400.

Wednesday 7th September – Milford Haven

The forecast did not seem bad at SW F4, but the sea when we tried to leave Milford Haven, was just hopeless so we gave up and went back up the bay to Milford Marina to re-fuel and moor for the night. Entrance is through a lock and Milford has nothing to recommend it. Pretty grim with old industrial remains. We took 306 litres of diesel. The engine checks showed a locking screw had fallen off one of the wiring covers on the engine but I was able to recover and re fit it.

Thursday 8th September - Padstow

We tried again to get out at 0945 and again had to turn back. Not a lot of wind but very heavy sea. Back into Dale Bay and the Pontoon. We had a nice walk and a beer + lunch at the pub which had rather a lot of flies.

Back to the boat on the anchored pontoon and we were relaxing when two very pleasant, but 'not to be messed with' men arrived in a RIB and asked to come aboard. They were dressed completely in black. As the rib was black too there was something a touch sinister about them. They were 'Special Branch' (they had a label on their arms to tell us). They wanted to inspect the boat and see identification and we had to fill in a form. Elisha was in the toilet so I shouted down that we 'had visitors'. To have said 'Police' might have sounded as if I was warning her. She shouted back 'who?'. After all we were the only boat on a small pontoon in the middle of Dale Bay and we knew nobody locally. When they asked for Passports and I called it through she came out to find the little cabin filled by the two large back clad Special Branch Policemen. "Are you going to arrest me?" She enquired.

It seems that radar had noticed this small fast boat run from Dublin to Wexford, come in close to land (collecting something, somebody?), turn and run across the channel and moor in a quiet bay instead of going to the Marina. However we convinced them we were harmless, they admired the boat, and we parted friends.

We tried to get out again after they had gone. At 1330. The sea was still very lumpy but a little better so we slogged on. It did improve slightly but it took us 4 hours to Padstow. We moored in the racing tide flow in the Pool and waited for the harbour gates to open.

We got in and tied up to a big 50 foot yacht with a single elderly gent on board with a home made wheel house shelter. He was very suspicious of 'launches' but became friendlier when we did everything right by his standards. Again lovely fresh cod in the fish and chips from Rick Stein's takeaway.

Forecast for Friday much the same. F5 /F6 SE. I am getting tired of this endless head wind. The elderly gent went so we got alongside. We idled away the day in Padstow.

Saturday 10th September - Salcombe

Forecast F3 E going F4. Well at least it is east and we'll be sheltered at first. Be on the nose going round Lands End though. We filled up with 188 litres and left the fuel berth at 1050. ETA Lands End 1300.

After an awfully long day we arrived at Salcombe in Devon at 1700. The log read 2,397 miles and engine hours 185.

We did 132 miles in 6 hours today at an average of 21 knots. In Salcombe we took on 185 litres of fuel.

I planned to go on to Lyminster in the morning but Mutiny broke out! Elisha went on strike so we stayed in Salcombe another night.

Monday 12th September - Lyminster

Forecast F4 NNE. The sliding roof lock is broken and the hatch slides like a guillotine and we have to push it back. I tied a loop of rope round to keep it open and avoid losing my head. The toilet seat clip is broken. The door catch is broken and we are tired.



Home at last. A weary Skipper and Crew tie up in Lymington

We set off hoping the lousy sea would back off. I should have turned back but did not as I now was very late home and needed to get back. We slogged on at about 14 knots all the way across Lyme Bay and only off Portland Bill did any sign of the sea dropping become apparent. The supercharger was in all the way. We finally got to Lymington where Anne-Marie, bless her, met us and we drank Champagne. Elisha and I were deaf from the engine noise, awfully tired and disorientated. But we had done it.

Epilogue

It was a fantastic journey. We didn't perhaps achieve all I had in mind. Never made the Orkney's but we did see a lot of the quite extraordinary wild and beautiful West Coast of Scotland. We covered 2,297 nautical miles and put 140 hours on the engines.

The biggest problem for us was the weather. For most of the time the wind was on the nose or close to it. Prevailing winds just didn't prevail. All the way up the wind blew from the north and all the way down the wind blew from the south.

I do deeply regret not leaving 'Elisha' in Scotland for the winter. Perhaps at Oban and going back the next year. It is an awfully long haul from Lymington. The first long stretch is just to get to Lands End and round it and start going north.

Until you get to Oban there are a good scattering of marinas where you can get power, fuel and a comfortable nights sleep. North of Oban in 2005 really there were none. I know there are limited facilities at Stornoway and some pontoons at Kyleakin but that's about it. Yes there is temporary pontoon at Lochinver, just put out with anchors holding it in the summer but none with power.

I have read that there are more 'pleasure boats' in Chichester Harbour than in the whole of Scotland. I believe it. You are very much on your own in the North.

Elisha (the boat) was not ideal. But she was all we had and she did very well considering it was not the use the designers had in mind. All the brochures show bikini clad girls lounging on the deck in the warm sun with a glass of wine. Around them the sea is calm and blue. She is certified by the French authorities as be fit for a F7 gale and huge wave heights. But I think F7 is different in France. In the sea conditions we met the sliding roof mechanism was a content problem and really dangerous as if the electrical locking mechanism failed the only way of securing it was with a large loop of rope. This was difficult to get in place in a heavy sea with the weight roof panel crashing back and forward.

Being guillotined was a serious possibility, as illustrated in the last picture. The built in Microwave was wrenched from its mounting off Skye and swung about madly suspend by its power cable.

I had specified the older less powerful KAD 43 Volvo diesels each producing 230 bhp. The later KAD 44 gave more power. But with a more difficult to service 4 valves per cylinder The KAD 44 also had lovely 'electronic' throttles. The KAD 43 had cables to control the engines from the helm. I reckoned the boatyards in the north probably weren't up to electronics and I was right! There are only two Volvo certified Agents in Scotland, all in the south. I carried a good supply of spares. Filters, anodes and so on. I also had a good tool kit. In Stornoway I asked the local boatyard if they had any Volvo oil filters. 'We could order some from Glasgow' he said doubtfully, 'but it would take four days or so'. He'd never seen a Duo-Prop let alone an electric throttle control. But cable engine controls he was happy with. If you go north it is advisable to have your spares with you and be able to do maintenance yourself.



Summary of Places Moored

2/7	Cherbourg – Bray
3/7	Bray – St Peters Port
7/7	St Peters Port – Derribie Bay
8/7	Derribie Bay - Falmouth
9/7	Falmouth – St Marys
11/7	Scillies – Padstow
12/7	Milford haven
13/7	Arklow
14/7	Dublin
26/7	Strangford
28/7	Stangford Portaferry
30/7	Bangor
31/7	Sanda
1/8	Gigha
2/8	Loch Shuna
5/8	Oban
6/8	Tobermory
7/8	Kylreakin
	Portree
8/8	Loch Maddy
9/8	Stornaway
20/8	Camus Ullapool
21/8	Lochinver
25/8	Dorney, Badachro
26/8	Inverie Knoydart
27/8	Dunstaffnage
29/8	Crinan
30/8	East Loch Tarbert
31/8	Sanda
1/9	Bangor
2/9	Ardglass
5/9	Dublin
6/9	Milford
7/9	Milford
8/9	Padstow
10/9	Salcombe
12/9	Home