

Cruise Log 2005 – Scotland, Crinan to Mull and small Isles

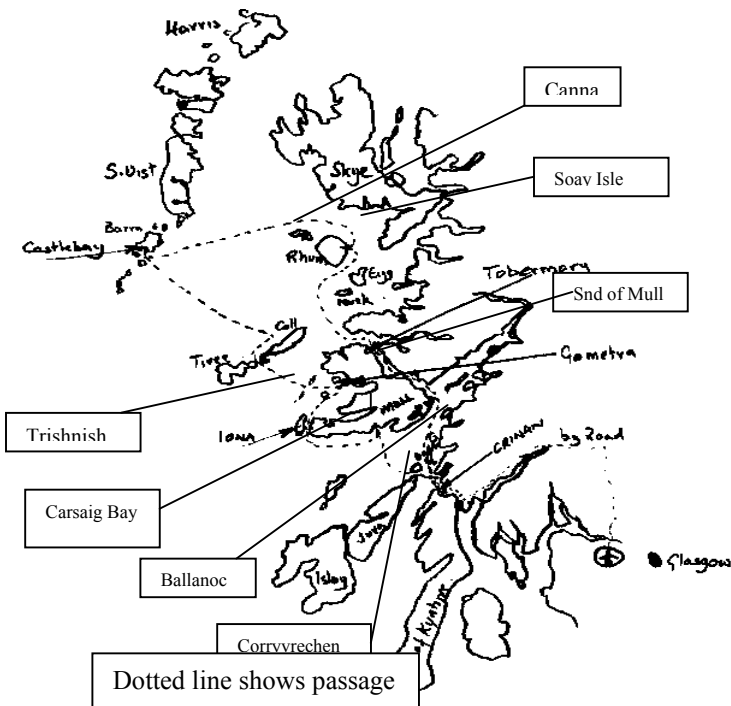
The log starts at the Boat show in January when I got together with my usual crew and looked at what boats the charter firms have to offer. We had found Argyll Yacht Charters, Scotland on the web and met them at the show. After some discussion booked 'Jos' a 34' fairly new Italian sloop, based at Ballanoch about one mile into the Western end of the Crinan Canal (which cuts through the Kintyre peninsula).

About a month before our charter date disaster struck at Argyll – the owners removed, without notice, Jos from the charter fleet and the standby boat lost its mast in a gale incurring £12000 of damage!

However they found an alternative in 'Thalia' a Swedish Contrast 362, about ten years old but £100 cheaper. As the crew from Surrey had by this time booked their flights to Glasgow I accepted and was proved right – the boat was all we could want in a yacht.



THALIA MOORED IN TOBERMORAY



I traveled on Friday 3rd June to Glasgow by car to an overnight B & B stop near to the beautiful Loch Winnock, 8 miles South of Glasgow. An early start on Saturday 4th June to go to Glasgow airport to collect the rest of my crew and then drive 88 miles to Ballanoch on the Crinan canal where Thalia was ready. A well equipped yacht with all the necessary instrumentation including an electronic chart plotter (Navman Trapper 5500) on board. This plotter instrument was the first of the type that I had ever used and proved its value for navigating in narrow channels, avoiding rocks and showing the depth at all time. It also showed, SOG, scale, lat. and long. and a chart of our location on its 6" X 6" screen to immediately detail where we were – even in the thick fog which we encountered one day.

After hand over at Ballanoch we departed through the sea lock and into Crinan bay then on into Loch Craignish for a short shakedown to anchor for the Saturday night in a bay near the picturesque town of Ardfern. Distance logged 20 miles. A pasta and Tuna bake cooked on board and washed down with some red wine rounded off the day



On Sunday 5th June we weighed anchor at 0930 in a light Westerly under sail. Through Doris Mor North into the Firth of Lorne where we sailed through the Sound of Luing past Fladda Lighthouse (see picture opposite).

The rain came down and we motored round Douart Point into the Sound of Mull. Then on to Tobermory through the narrow and very shallow (a foot under the keel) South entrance between Calve Island and Mull. Picking up a mooring next to the pontoons at 1800. Distance logged 40 miles. This was the only place where we had to pay for mooring - £12 on a buoy or £24 if we had gone onto a pontoon – anchoring was free! Tobermory is a most attractive town with houses in many different colours and several good eating-places and inns. We ate very well in a restaurant over the first pub you come to.

On Monday 6th June we departed Tobermory at 0930 and motored West out of the sound then North past Ardnamurkin point (where the wind increased to a SW F4) en route for the small isles. Sails were hoisted to make 6 kts on 320 degrees for most of the day passing Eigg and Muck on passage to Rhum where we anchored for the night in Loch Scresort. The whole island is a nature reserve and there are no shore facilities so we stayed afloat and cooked Fray Bentos tinned pies – delicious washed down with a couple of bottles of wine. Distance logged 37 miles.

Tuesday 7th we raised anchor at 0920 and set sail in a SE 4 with one reef in 18 knots of wind to round Eastwards and North round Rhum, with Soay island to starboard. After about 45 minutes the wind increased and a second reef was put in the main and the genoa furled by a third. Quite a swell and white horses soon developed with the wind at 25 knots and an occasional 30 knot gust pushed us along at 7.5 knots over the ground. We passed three warships, not all British, and heard radio calls from at least one Submarine warning ferries and fishermen of their position (this area is described on the charts as a Submarine Exercise area). Fortunately they missed us. With echo sounder showing a depth of only 1.9 meters at one time we thought that it might be a sub under us – there is a thought, or could it have been air bubbles from the surf?. Going North of Canna Island we continued our course for Castle Bay on Barra in the outer Hebrides. A bit of a rolly polly ride over 40 miles lead us to the Bo Vich Chuan cardinal buoy at 1630, picking up a mooring in Castlebay, the main town on Barra at 1730. Distance logged 43 miles. On going ashore up the hill from the harbour there were 3 young females beckoning from a window for my 3 young (I looked too old) crew to join them – what, in the Hebridean Islands. A pint in the pub and an excellent meal in the Castlebay Hotel was the option taken. Back on the boat we watched the Ferry from Oban arrive at 2230 (seven hours from Oban via S.Uist).

Wednesday 8th dawned with a bit less wind, Southerly F4, and after a short trip ashore for some provisions we slipped at 10 am, motored out of the bay then hoisted sails (2 reefs in the main). Our passage today to go to an anchorage on Gometra (a small well sheltered bay on the West of Mull). A few dolphins entertained us for a while doing their usual acrobatics around the boat. After about 8 miles we encountered heavy fog – visibility poor at less than 400 mtrs. An immediate plot of the fix on the chart with EPs then plotted every hour alongside the GPS location reading.. This is the time that Navman and the GPS came in very useful and aided us to pass safely through a narrow channel between Coll and Tirree, named Gunna Sound, only getting a short glimpse of land/hills on either side. The fog concentrated our minds on the job in hand so that a continuous look out was maintained. After Gunna Sound we crossed to the Trishnish Islands, again in fog and without seeing any land either side of the mile wide channel between the 2 Trishnish Island headlands of Lunga and Dutchman's Cap. Fog remained with us and we anchored in 6 meters with 40 meters or so of chain at Gometra at about 9 pm. Distance logged 40 miles. A good meal of spaghetti bolognese (and Red) rejuvenated us for the night in a very quiet, foggy and still anchorage.

After the interesting passage of Wednesday we enjoyed a lie in until 9 am on Thursday 9th followed by a leisurely breakfast, still in fog, and waited until 1100 when the fog began to lift to get away under sail on passage for Carsaig Bay South of Mull. This route took us past Staffa Island, with a brief look at Fingles Cave, in a force 3/4 with the weather changing to a bright and sunny day. We could now continue with just plotting our usual fixes on the chart every hour. Plenty of the pretty puffins to be seen on the way today. We decided to break this leg and anchor off the pier in Iona sound (on SW corner of Mull) and enjoy a trip ashore to view the Cathedral, originally built in 583. A fish and chip lunch at the local washed down by a pint was heaven. We set off again at 1545 with the intention of going to Loch Spelve on

East Mull. However the wind dropped and made it unlikely to reach Loch Spelve before dark. There are no navigation lights on any buoys in a narrow entrance, before so we kept to our original plan of Carsaig bay. Once through the inside passage of the Torron Rocks (SW corner of Mull) and out off the Ross of Mull the wind picked up and we began to cream along at 7.5 knots on a reach – very enjoyable. The pilot describes Carsaig as a “temporary” anchorage and did not say why or what “temporary” meant. . With the wind dropping and coming off the land we anticipated a quiet night so we anchored in 5 meters with 40 meters of chain. Distance logged 55 miles. A chicken pie with the usual trimmings and the usual glass of red, on board before turning in with the boat rolling with the swell from the open sea (now we knew what “temporary” meant). I was awoken by the sound of strong winds at 0230 and looked out to check that we were still in the same place with the anchor holding (40 meters of chain was a good decision) but decided to stay awake just in case. Did not stay awake long and was relieved to awake again at 0700 and find the wind had died and we were still in the same place and not dragged.

On Friday 10th June we departed Carsaig at 0900 in a light NW wind motor sailing most of the time. We crossed the Firth of Lorne past the Garvellachs to pass through the Gulf of Corryvechin (between Scarba and Jura islands) on our final leg. This piece of water is reportedly the most notoriously rough piece of any area around the British Isles with the pilot book giving strong warnings not to get the timing wrong. If you use this passage with a wind in the opposite direction to the tide the pilot warns to not attempt under any circumstances since it has been known that an East wind against the ebb can produce up to 18 foot standing waves - an interesting thought. We had the flow (ebb) and the wind with us with 1.5 to 2 hours to go before the tide changed so we ventured through. Our speed in the Gulf was 6 knots through the water but over the ground it was 13.4 knots thrusting us out into the Sound of Jura where we crossed through Dorus Mhor (the Big Door) into Craignish sound to anchor at a lagoon near Ardfern. Went ashore in dinghy and walked to village to enjoy a lunch at Pub. Returned and motored round to Ardfern marina for diesel (27.5litres was all we had used in the week) and water. Sailed and tacked back down Loch Craignish in bright sunshine and WSW4, watching the seals on the rocks as we made for Crinan bay. Then into the Crinan canal to Ballanoch where we moored Thalia ready for hand over early on Saturday morning as early flights were booked for my crew from Surrey. Distance logged 35 miles.

A trip in a good sea boat covering over 270 miles in a week was a very enjoyable trip. We were also very lucky with the weather as an added bonus in this part of Britain with its spectacular scenery.

Derek Nice. Skipper.