

ARIADNE'S SCOTTISH CRUISE 2012

By Alan Leonard

Ariadne's Scottish cruise began with a singlehanded passage from her mooring at Whiterock to Bangor, on Friday 1st June, so that we could take part in the Jubilee sailpast the following day. The wind was light northeasterly, so the day was mostly spent motorsailing, interspersed with short periods under sail alone, when there was enough wind. Secure in Bangor that evening, attention was turned to arranging the code flags in order, to dress overall for the sailpast.



After the sailpast, we enjoyed the festivities in the Clubhouse. However, the plan for the next day was beginning to give cause for concern, as the forecast was for a stiff northeasterly. The ICC Northern Spring Rally was to be held in Portpatrick on the Sunday evening and as I was hosting the Drinks Reception on board Ariadne, it behoved me to get there! As one member said, "If you were cruising and arrived in Bangor, with that forecast, the one place you would NOT go, would be Portpatrick!"

The passage to Portpatrick was rough and uncomfortable, with the Ram Harry race particularly so. However, it was soon forgotten, when alongside in Portpatrick. Recovery was aided by quantities of apparently innocuous, but actually lethal punch, before we all retired to the Crown, for a splendid dinner, ably organised by Tony Weston.

After the Northern Rally on Sunday 3rd June, my son Colin and I had the remainder of the week to enjoy some Western Isles cruising.



Leaving Portpatrick an hour or so before high water on Monday morning, we took the tide north for the Mull of Kintyre, with no very clear destination in mind. Calm and sunny, a greater contrast with the previous day could hardly have been imagined. As we passed the Mull that afternoon, the occasional tidal ripple gave no indication of what those waters could deliver in adverse conditions. We settled on the Ardmore Islands as a likely destination for the day – if for no reason other than that it seemed a good idea to continue more or less in a straight line! It also positioned us well for the sound of Islay next day. We anchored in the south anchorage at Plod Sgeiran, after a pleasant days motor sailing.



Approaching the Ardmore Isles. Paps of Jura in the background.

So often, one arrives in the vicinity of the Sound of Islay just as the tide turns against you! Not this time! We left Plod Sgeiran at 1000 hrs to be at McArthur Head just as the tide turned in our favour. There was a 15-20 knot southerly in the Sound, before which we were soon running under Spinnaker.



The wind fell away after we left the Sound. The choice of anchorage for that night became a pressing matter, as we hoped to observe the Transit of Venus next morning. It was predicted to be visible in these islands from sunrise, until it was complete, (i.e. egress exterior) a little over an hour later. We needed somewhere open to the north east, with no land nearer than the horizon or at least if there was any, it should be low lying, so that the sun would have risen above it before the transit was complete. We needed somewhere clear from Azimuth 55° to 58° . Somewhere near the southern end of the Outer Hebrides (perhaps Vatersay) would be ideal, but too far away. Tiree would also have been suitable – particularly Hynish at the southwest end, where we had visited the Skerryvore Museum a few years ago. However, Colonsay was right beside us and filled the bill. The only problem was that it was forecast to blow from the northeast that night. It was also looking unlikely that conditions would be suitable for observation, as there was a forecast 70% probability of cloud cover. In the event, we decided that a sheltered anchorage was more important, but it should be one from which we could quickly gain a suitable position at sunrise (04:48:53) should conditions be clear. We anchored for the night in the Tinker's Hole. I woke in the small hours to hear the wind howling over the rocky bluff beneath which we were anchored and was glad not to be bouncing up and down off a lee shore. We rose at dawn and though it was obvious that we would not see the Transit (as happened to the French Astronomer Le Gentil in 1769) decided that as we were awake we might as well start our day.

As we passed through the Sound of Iona, a lone figure waved at us from the grounds of the Abbey. We wondered if he had been attending to his devotions, or was he of scientific bent and also hoping to observe the Transit? We suspected the latter.



Sound of Iona at 0600 hrs.

North of the Sound we enjoyed a pleasant beat in a light northerly past Staffa and the Treshnish Isles, to Tobermory, where we made fast to the fuel berth at 1100 hrs.





On Thursday 7th June, we woke to a perfect morning with not a cloud in the sky – why could the previous day not have been like this? Murphy has a lot to answer for! Ah well, if I have any great grandchildren perhaps one of them will see the next Transit in 2117! We motored out past Ardnamurchan and a little to the north of it set sail again to a light northerly.



As we beat north in perfect conditions, with spectacular views of the Small Isles and the Cuillin, at one stage our VMG was 2 knots, with 1 knot of adverse tide. Our perseverance was rewarded when a nice breeze filled in. We made fast to the new marina in Mallaig at 1530. That evening we enjoyed watching a steam locomotive shunting the carriages of the “Harry Potter” train and were surprised to meet friends from Killinchy in the Spar shop! Colin had to return to work and I had to attend a function on the Friday evening so we left by train next morning.

Why then, is the Transit of Venus so important? Quite simply, because it allowed the first calculation of the size of the Solar system. The German Astronomer Johannes Kepler, in 1619, had worked out the relative distances between the planets, but the absolute distances were not known. Edmund Halley (of Comet fame) realised that if the length of the transit across the sun could be measured (by timing it) at widely separated locations, it would be possible to calculate the Astronomical Unit, or distance from the Earth to the Sun. In 1716 he wrote an essay in Latin (the scientific lingua franca of the time) describing what had to be done, although aware that he would not live to see it. It was as a result of this, that Captain Cook was despatched to Tahiti where he set up an observatory in his shore base, appropriately named Fort Venus (though his junior officers may have thought that there was a different reason for the name). It was as a result of his and other successful observations in 1769 that the figure of 93-95 million miles was arrived at, remarkably close to the modern figure of 92,995,807 miles.

Connla Magennis, John McCrea and myself set off to join *Ariadne* in Mallaig on Saturday 9th June, arriving at 23:55. Next morning we had a leisurely start, provisioning, stowing and chatting to Alastair Jackson on board *Wild Child*, the Starlight 39 in the next berth. It is remarkable how similar the 35 and 39 are in appearance – at first glance I thought that *Wild Child* was a 35 and he thought that *Ariadne* was a 39! That afternoon, we motored north into a light northerly.

At 17:30, we anchored in Sandaig Bay – Camusfearna of Gavin Maxwell fame.



It seemed too good an opportunity to miss – as it is completely open to the southwest one so rarely gets the chance to stop there. Ashore for a walk that evening, the only traces of his presence were the memorials – one to him on the site of his cottage and another much larger one to Edel, the otter, under a tree near the stream in which he used to play.

We timed our departure next morning to arrive at Kyle Rhea as the tide turned in our favour. We had a reach along Loch Alsh and, clear of the Kyle Akin Bridge, a close reach to the Crowlin Islands. We listened to the Butec Range Control broadcasting “Testing will take place in the Inner Sound”. Passing close by a fleet tender, we expected him to call us on the VHF, but the skipper just stepped out of his wheelhouse and hailed “Just keep close inshore on the way up and you’ll be fine”. Wind up, engine off, wind down, engine on – we gradually made our way north. That afternoon, north of Loch Gairloch, the wind filled in from just east of north and with the weather going tide, a lumpy sea soon kicked up. We motorsailed as close inshore as we dared, to get what shelter we could. At Ru Re there was nothing else for it – we had to beat. We took a reef in the main, unfurled most of the genoa, and got to work. After standing to the north, we tacked across to the north of the peninsula west of Loch Ewe. We didn’t allow quite enough for leeway so had to take another tack to weather the island just west of the entrance. When we bore away into Loch Ewe, we inspected the anchorages at Mellon Charles and the next bay to the east, but decided to run further into the Loch and anchored at Altbea. It was a pity not to visit the Poolewe Gardens, but the anchorage at Camus Glas was not really suitable for such windy conditions with a northerly swell. The gardens will have to wait for another year.

Tuesday 12th June set the pattern for the next week, sunny but cold, with a fresh northeasterly wind. We motorsailed with one reef in the main to the entrance of Loch Ewe, where we unfurled most of the genoa and set off to beat to the Summer Isles. Beating to windward is all right, provided that you are not going too far! We eased sheets to pass to the south of the Summer Isles and then hardened up and beat to our anchorage in the north of Bardentarbet Bay, north of Achiltiebuie. We had a good walk ashore in the evening, to a very well stocked shop and watched a crew training in their gig. Apparently they had rowed on the Thames in the Jubilee Celebrations.



The daily programme was becoming familiar. We motorsailed out through Dorney Sound, where we had difficulty in identifying the transit to avoid Iolla Mealan. When clear of the Sound, the genoa was unfurled and off we went to the north, in 12 knots from the north northeast. There was a challenge to see which helmsman (if any!) could achieve a VMG of 4 knots. As we approached Ru Stoer, the familiar pattern continued, as the wind freshened and the sea built with the weather going tide. We crashed windward for a short time, before easing sheets for a fast reach to Loch Cairnbhan.



We handed sail just outside the narrows at Kylesku and motored in through Loch Glencoul to anchor in the innermost part of Loch Beag, where I had anchored in *Wishbone* almost exactly 40 years ago. To me, it is one of the best anchorages in the whole of the West Coast. Landlocked, perfectly sheltered, with high mountains all round and stunning scenery. Two deer drinking in the stream at the head ran off when our anchor went down.



On Thursday 14th June we woke to a sunny morning and motored out of Loch Beag, with the dangers clearly visible. We marvelled at a major civil engineering works on the north side of Lough Glendhu, which we subsequently discovered to be the Maldie Burn Hydroelectric Scheme. Clearing the narrows at slack water, the wind was light southeasterly. We reached out past the Badcall Islands towards Handa in flat water. The wind died in the lee of Handa and shortly after came back from the northeast with a vengeance and the sea built rapidly. Reef down, furl some genoa, strap in and off to the north on starboard tack. We tacked in towards Loch Laxford and then back on to starboard just off that particular Dubh Sgeir. Approaching Bodha Roin, we tacked on to the leading line for Loch Inchar. It blew hard straight out of the Loch for the last few miles. Finally, we eased off into Loch Bervie, making fast initially to the new pontoon on the port hand, but then moving to the original one at the head on the starboard side for a quieter berth in the fresh northeasterly.



The new pontoon in Loch Bervie



It is a sign of the times to see a major fishing port lying empty, but it was nice to be moored under Foinaven, whose summit we had visited a few years ago.

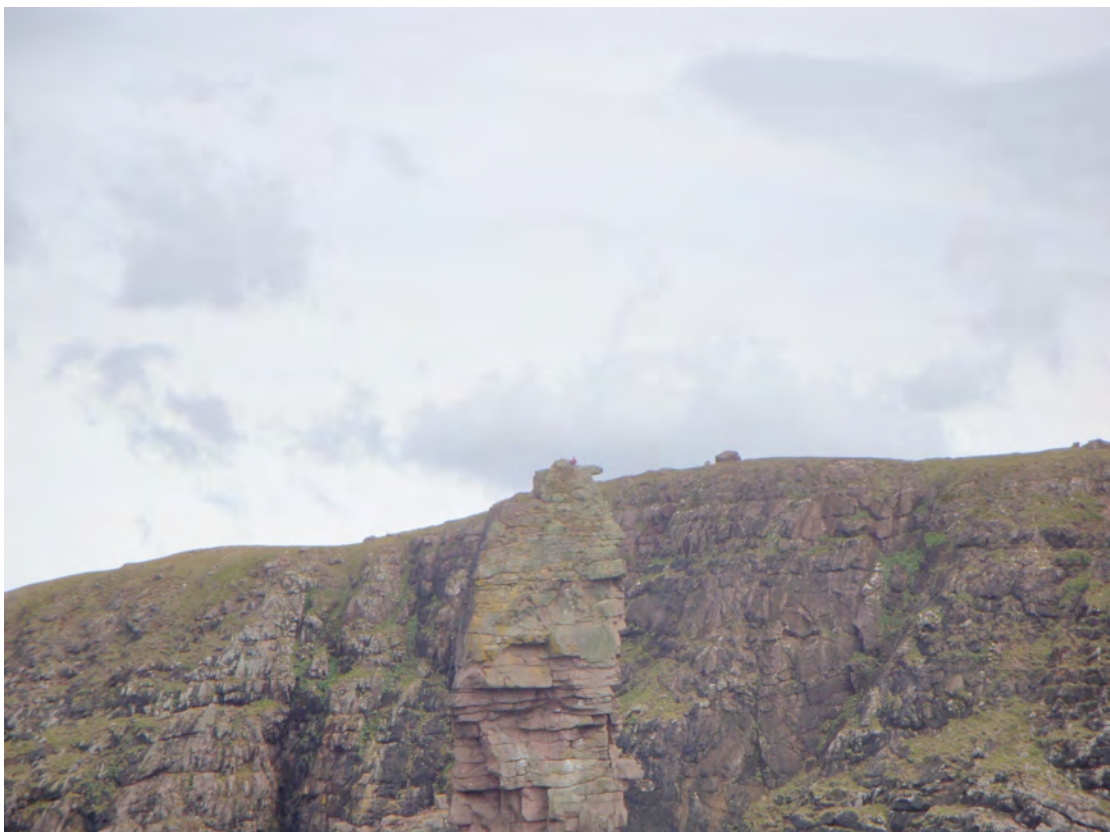


The stiff northeasterly put paid to any thoughts of Cape Wrath and the Orkneys, so it was time to turn south, but would the wind have the same idea? We hoped not. It would be a pity to be so far north and not see all the anchorages, so we slipped down the coast to Loch Laxford. The three peaks of Foinaven, Arkle and Ben Stack gave a stunning backdrop as we motored in to anchor in Loch Chad Fi for coffee

and to make sandwiches for later in the day. As we passed the Ridgeways Adventure Centre on the way out, the man himself came out to give us a cheery wave. *English Rose* was hauled out and securely tied down.



The forecast was northeasterly 5-6 becoming northerly 4-5 later, but in the event, it remained in the northeasterly quadrant. After a brisk reach across Edrachilles Bay we were astonished to see a solo climber summit on the Old Man of Stoer. Each to his own!



We handed sail off Soyea and motored the last few miles into Loch Inver, dead up wind, in 28 knots.



So far, my annual fear that the wind would go southerly as we headed south was unfounded, as the forecast was again for northeasterly 5-6, with a gradual veer.

Clear of Loch Inver, we shook out yesterday's reef and unfurled the genoa. At Ru Coigagh we bore away to 225°, almost a dead run, so rigged a boom preventer and strapped down the boomed out genoa. It was gray and cool but so much milder going down wind. Visibility was good and the view of the sawtoothed skyline of improbable mountains amazing. Off Ru Re at 14:00, after 16:00 we gybed into the Sound of Raasay, in 25-30 knots. An hour later we gybed again just north of Portree, where we picked up a mooring at 18:15. Log 64 miles, 8 hours, that'll do! The visitors moorings in Portree are too close together, so we later moved to one further out.



After a morning ashore in Portree, we motorsailed (but mainly motored) south in the Sound of Raasay and east under the Skye Bridge past Kyle of Loch Alsh and through Kyle Rhea.



Finally, south of Kyle Rhea the wind filled in for a short reach to Isle Ornsay.

The Sound of Sleat was calm and sunny but cool next morning as we motored south. A whale cruised slowly north. Eventually a breeze filled in and we drifted south towards Ardnamurchan, with spectacular views of Rhum and the Cuillin to starboard.



At Ardnamurchan, we bore away and set the spinnaker, whereupon the wind backed. After gybing, we hit a fine reach to Ru na Gall, where we handed the spinnaker in good time before reaching Tobermory, where we made fast at 15:30.



Ashore in the evening, we had a superb meal in the award winning Café Fish, where we sampled Razor Clams for the first time. Later, *Katrilli*, Frank Smyth, came in on her way home from the Faeroes. We had Frank, Roddy Monson, Robert Hume and Roland Richards and Colin and Sue Cunningham *Finisterre* on board. The crack went on long into the night!

Tuesday 19th June was another calm day so the Sound of Mull passed in a faint haze of diesel smoke. We carried the tide as far as Loch Don, where a breeze filled in on the nose but we were so near to the entrance of our destination (Loch Spelve) that it was hardly worth making sail. In the narrows, the mobile rang. It was Mick Delap, to say that *North Star* was in Kerrera marina. Reluctantly, we came to the conclusion that there wasn't time to meet, as he was leaving later that afternoon. On the passage through the narrows we could not identify any of the Cairns described in the sailing directions. We anchored for lunch in the northwest arm of Loch Spelve and spent the afternoon there, then took the evening tide out of the Loch again, for a fine reach across to Puilladobhain. We had to do the "dog in the basket" routine to find a spot of anchor, as there were 13 boats there already.

We left Puilladobhrain early to take advantage of the strong fair tide at Fladda, in the Sound of Luing and the Sound of Jura. The day followed the familiar pattern of wind down, engine on, wind up, unfurl genoa. Eventually at 11:30 the tide was against us so we motored through the Ardmore Island passage to Iomallich, then on to the Texa/Port Ellen light transit, turned to starboard towards the Lagavulin distillery (with only the letters ULIN visible) and finally to starboard again, to anchor in Loch an T'Sailen at 13:45.



Ashore for a walk, we arrived at the Ardbeg Distillery too late for the last tour. Perhaps it's just as well as I found getting out from amongst the rocks at the entrance to Loch an T'Sailen confusing enough without the effects of their peaty malt! We moved to Port Ellen marina for the night, to be well positioned to cross the North Channel next day.

Again, the wind was fresh from the north northeast. Our departure for Glenarm from the green buoy was at 07:15. An hour later the wind freshened, so we pulled down a reef and took a few rolls in the genoa. As we approached the separation zone, there was a large vessel just entering the southbound lane, so we thought that we should do the text book thing and cross at right angles. This was to be our undoing, as it meant that we ended up too far west – in the Mac Donnell Race, which was “interesting”. We also ended up too close in at Tor Head, which was also interesting. The next couple of hours were most uncomfortable though we made good progress. We made fast in Glenarm at 12:30 alongside *Katrilli*.

Shortly after we arrived everyone else, including Frank, seemed to leave. What did they know that we didn't? There was a vigorous low in the western approaches and people were hoping to get to their destinations before the blow came. We elected to stay and hoped that we too would make our destination, Carrickfergus, before the blow came. Next morning we had a pleasant reach down the County Antrim coast, despite some heavy rain but at Kilroot Jetty it freshened suddenly and dramatically, right on the nose. We motored straight up wind to Carrickfergus Harbour, the last 2 miles taking an hour and a quarter.

All in all, a most enjoyable cruise. We beat round Ru Re, Ru Coigagh, Greenstone Point, Ru Stoer and Handa, at times in quite fresh conditions but were rewarded by the wind staying in the north, while we made our way home. I feel that we may put forward the following aphorisms:

- 1 Gentleman **may** sail to windward, even in quite fresh conditions, provided that it is sunny.
- 2 The distance for which it is enjoyable to sail to windward is inversely proportional to the sum of wind strength and sea state.
- 3 If there is a perfectly sheltered anchorage at the end of the beat, so much the better.

Table of Distances Whiterock – Loch Bervie – Carrickfergus 1st – 22nd June

Whiterock - Bangor	40.0
Bangor – Portpatrick	22.0
Portpatrick – Plod Sgeiran	57.0
Plod Sgeiran – Tinker’s Hole	45.0
Tinker’s Hole – Tobermory	37.0
Tobermory – Mallaig	40.0
Mallaig – Sandaig Bay	12.5
Sandaig Bay – Loch Ewe	64.0
Loch Ewe –Bardantarbet Bay	24.0
Bardentarbet Bay – Loch Beag	46.0
Loch Beag – Kinlochbervie	30.0
Kinlochbervie – Loch Laxford – Loch Inver	40.0
Loch Inver – Portree	64.0
Portree – Isle Ornsay	35.0
Isle Ornsay – Tobermory	45.0
Tobermory – Loch Spelve – Puilladobhrain	38.0
Puilladobhrain – Loch an T’Sailen – Port Ellen	55.0
Port Ellen – Glenarm	42.0
Glenarm – Carrickfergus	<u>21.5</u>
Total	758.0