

# Boyd's Rules

## Cruise to the Faroe Islands

Boyd Holmes

*Awarded the Claymore Cup*



Identifying somewhere interesting for a cruise away from home waters is the easy bit. Maintaining the initial enthusiasm as the date of departure approaches and the challenge of any ocean passages becomes real, can give rise to second thoughts. I am not the first, nor probably the last skipper, to develop this pre-cruise anxiety, and to ensure that the cruise happens I have set myself some simple rules, known unsurprisingly as 'Boyd's Rules'.

First, identify the remote cruising ground some years ahead, so pushing consideration of any likely hazards over the planning horizon and prevent the inconvenience of those aspects causing the cruise to be aborted at an early stage.

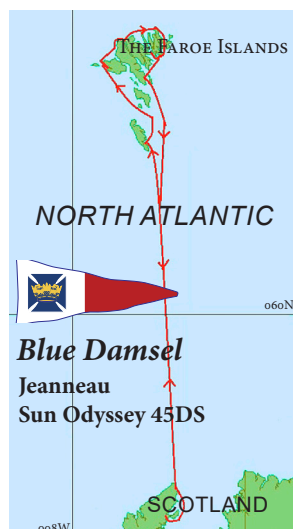
Second, tell sailing friends that is where you are going to go, not as an expression of bravura but as a device to prevent any back sliding when detailed planning begins to confront the possible folly of the venture.

Next, sound out likely crew members. Are they willing? Can they manage the full cruise, or part only? Identify a time window for the cruise and book a crew.

Now the opportunities for back sliding are greatly reduced. Then set to work on the detailed planning, including acquisition of charts and pilot books.

My point of no return is reached when the order is placed for the required courtesy ensign.

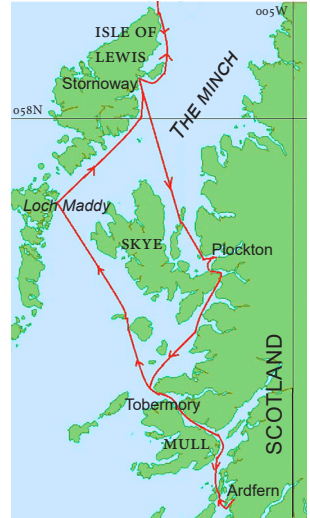
In view of the hammering endured on actual and aborted cruises to the Faroe Islands and Iceland in late June 2022, back sliding would certainly have been on the agenda had it not been for the application of Boyd's Rules.



After loading stores and securing the obligatory fender board for the Faroes, we left Ardfern in Argyll on the West Coast of Scotland on 3 June in *Blue Damsel*, a Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 45DS, for an uneventful passage with the tide to the entrance to Loch Spelve, Isle of Mull. Well, it was uneventful until the Sea Talk network went down just as we entered the loch depriving us of log, depth and wind data, but not the chart plotter nor its GPS feed. Happily, the first mate, Alan, includes electronic engineering amongst his many skills and worked on the problem until a late supper called a halt to the investigation. Alan restarted his investigation early on Sunday morning when, having traced many cables, he concluded that there had to be another 'grey box' hidden somewhere – possibly in plain sight. A call to David Wilkie (RCC), who was cruising off Dunmore East in the Republic of Ireland, confirmed the existence of just such a box. One of Alan's assistants, Dave, eventually found it hidden behind a panel in the port aft cabin. After changing a 3-amp fuse Sea Talk came back to life. When Sea Talk went down for the second time Alan had further conversations with David and then Andrew Ashton at Ardfarn Yacht Centre before Alan administered TLC to the connectors at the elusive grey box and our Sea Talk problems passed into history.

Whilst the search for the grey box had delayed our departure from Loch Spelve it meant that we were able to ride a fair tide up the Sound of Mull with some good sailing in sunny and warm conditions. On approaching Tobermory, and calculating that the Doirlinn (south passage to Tobermory harbour) had sufficient height of tide to cope with our draft of 2.3 metres, we detoured through Tobermory Bay before crossing to Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan peninsula and anchoring alongside Dunkirk Little Ship *Chico* for the night.

Our weather apps were predicting that the light winds would build during the following day and once we were past the Isle of Skye would veer in our favour, which proved to be accurate. We arrived in Loch Maddy, North Uist, just after 1700 after 67nm with three reefs in the mainsail and a reefed headsail





Dave enjoying the sun

Ullapool approached the harbour at over 18 kts. Thursday in Stornoway was given over to shopping and making final preparations for the passage to Suðuroy, the most southerly of the Faroe Islands.

Being aware that the Royal Thames YC is strict about flag etiquette, I was puzzled to see *Lena*, a Boreal 52, wearing both the RTYC burgee and vice commodore's broad pennant on the port spreader whilst alongside in Stornoway. The conundrum was solved after Dave reported that *Lena's* blue ensign was defaced with white stars, i.e. the Australian National Flag. The Royal Brighton Yacht Club in Melbourne, Australia, which can trace its origins back to 1875, shares its burgee with the Royal Thames and has a long-standing warrant for its members to fly the undefaced blue ensign. Whilst *Lena's* skipper, Anthony Baird, allowed the vice commodore to fly his flag he insisted that as owner he was going to fly the club's burgee. Neither had been able to buy an undefaced blue ensign and so, whilst enjoying *Lena's* generous hospitality on Thursday evening, I presented Anthony with *Blue Damsel's* spare blue ensign. Australian vessels less than 24 metres have the option of flying either the Australian red ensign or the Australian National Flag. The privilege of flying the undefaced blue ensign subsists and I felt that *Lena's* compliance with the terms of the club's warrant was a matter for the skipper.

We left Stornoway Harbour on Friday morning, having first spoken to SCG (Stornoway Coastguard) on the telephone about our planned passage north. SCG asked that we notify them on departure and they would inform Faroes Coastguard of our intentions. After getting the obligatory permission from the HM on VHF channel 12 to move through the harbour we left our berth just before 1000. Whilst I hold a permit for *Blue Damsel* to wear the undefaced blue ensign, I had already

before anchoring in Spanish Harbour. Whilst Ardmaddy Bay is a great place to sit out a gale, Spanish offered a welcome change, with bags of room and reasonable holding, although not a place to anchor if wanting a run ashore to the pub without a reliable outboard motor.

An early start on Tuesday took us to the beautiful anchorage behind Eilean Thinngarstaigh in Loch Claidh before reaching Stornoway on Wednesday. With the permission of the HM (harbourmaster) Dave, a physics graduate, started to calibrate the boat's magnetic compasses in the outer harbour at Stornoway, but had to abort that exercise as the ferry from

decided to fly the red ensign in Faroese waters to avoid any confusion over our nationality and so we re-flagged before leaving the pontoon.

We had been monitoring the weather on a variety of apps for several days, all of which indicated fair winds for the passage north, which proved to be correct. After motoring for nearly three hours in light airs the wind rose to F3 from NNE and at 1247 we set full sail on a course of 332°. We had passed between Sula Sgeir and Rona by 2000, when the wind had risen to E5 and we were clipping along nicely at over seven knots with two reefs in the mainsail and a few furls in the headsail. The wind continued to strengthen and veer overnight until falling back to SE4 by mid-morning, by which time we had enjoyed almost 24 hours of fast, if bumpy, sailing. As the wind had blown itself out by lunchtime we motored for the final five hours. We dropped anchor off Lopra in Vágshjørður, Suðuroy at 1800, having first notified



*Blue Damsel* alongside in Vágur

peaceful night, undisturbed by the light rain, happy that my investment in the Faroese courtesy ensign and a new Q flag had not been wasted.

After a substantial cooked breakfast on Sunday morning we motored across the fjord to the harbour at Vágur where, happily, the HM concurred with our choice of berth on the quayside. This was the first test of our fender board, which we deployed between our fenders and the large black, rubber tyres on the wall. In making the fender board Alan had followed the design used by Mike Jaques, winner of the Tilman Medal, who had advised that, whilst the board might appear to be too long when in the workshop at home, it would

Tórshavn Radio of our arrival. The Imray/RCCPF SDs (sailing directions) describe the anchorage as 'squally and unsatisfactory in south and southwest winds' but as the forecast was for light winds from the south-east I was happy to anchor off the harbour in 8m. We enjoyed a

Livestock across from Vágur



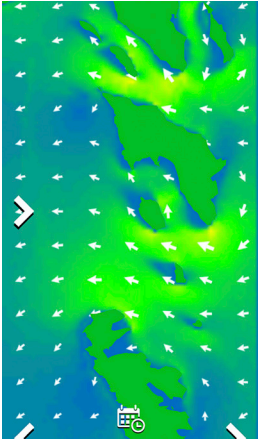
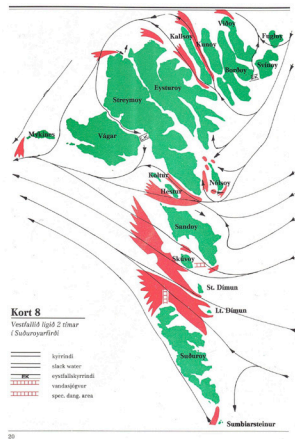


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be only just adequate in use. Mike was, of course, correct. Whilst we used the board only twice in our week in the Faroes, it earned its keep when we did.

Dave accompanied the Vágur HM to his office, as he had studied both the UK and Faroese customs and immigration requirements. Having reported our arrival to the local police office by email the HM told Dave that we were unlikely to see anything of the police and that we had no further formalities to observe before cruising around the islands. With Dave negotiating our freedom with the HM I walked around Vágur, which is not the liveliest of places on a Sunday. The two filling stations were open but did not sell local SIM cards. I was, however, able to get local currency from an ATM, and the Wi-Fi at the tourist information office near the harbour was both ‘open’ and free. Using the free Wi-Fi Alan and I both downloaded e-SIM cards which gave us 6GB of data-only mobile phone usage for 15 days. As WhatsApp operates on data we were able to speak to family and friends back in the UK without ever buying a local SIM card, in addition to using email and downloading the UK news. In the afternoon the crew, as befits the members of a mountain rescue team, took a walk to the British WWII observation post at Eggjarnar with views over Suðuroy’s west coast, whilst I slept and read a newspaper on my tablet.

The Streymkort and the Rák app.



For our passage on Monday we were going to experience the strong and at times dangerous local tides. Information on tides is available from a number of sources but the most popular are the free app Rák and *Streymkort fyrri Føroyar* (paper tidal atlas for the Faroe Islands) commonly known as the ‘red scary book’. We would have



Coastal Art - Suðuroy



Sea cliffs in Sørvágsfjørður

been able to get by with Rák, although it was helpful to look at the hour-by-hour pages in the paper atlas and to compare these with Rák, but only after having ascertained the moon's meridian passage for the day. Just as well that Dave and I had done our homework on the Streymkort, which is only partially and imperfectly translated from Faroese into English, before we left home. In practice, we found the tides to be similar in strength to those in the Gulf of Corryvreckan and the Sound of Jura, which is home turf for *Blue Damsel* and, once understood, made for fast and comfortable passages around the islands.

After settling the HM's modest charge we left Vágur at 0845 on a sunny, calm Monday morning for the 50nm passage to Sørvágur at the head of Sørvágsfjørður on the island of Vágar.

Whilst the tides were strong, the wind was not, and we were able to sail for only five of the 50nm. This passage gave us our first taste of the stunning scenery. In fine and sunny but chilly conditions there were many opportunities for great photographs, both in open water and in the fjord approaching Sørvágur. Both the SDs



Bøur in Sørvágsfjørður

and the Cruising Association's cruising guide recommend berthing in front of the old fish processing plant close to the small boat harbour. Unfortunately the wall was full of rafted fish farm boats, leaving only the ferry berth free, so we decided to berth on the long outer wall. At 2.5 metres Sørvágur has the greatest tidal range in the islands and so we were careful to set the fenders and fender board at a height which would not get trapped under the large black tyres after low water. After fruitless



Risín og Kellingin, sea stacks off Eysturoy

attempts at calling the HM on the VHF, and finding all the commercial premises closed, it was unlikely that we would be disturbed during the night. The crew took a walk ashore where they were fortunate to find a small café serving beer. As there was no sign of the HM in the morning, Traditional sea skiffs in Eiði



Eiði - a quiet & tidy place we had enjoyed a free night alongside.

Our 22nm passage to the charming village of Eiði on Eysturoy at the northern end of the Sundini channel was no less scenic than that from Vágur to Vágar. Eiði, where the Plymouth Brethren hold sway, is a quiet





Fog on passage to Klaksvik

and tidy place with a well-stocked supermarket albeit alcohol-free, and no hint of a café or bar.

The long pontoon, just inside the harbour entrance, was alive with unsupervised but well-scrubbed children all wearing the same pattern of buoyancy aid. We berthed for the night on the outside of the pontoon and filled up with water. A local fisherman, who later introduced us to his Scottish wife, gave us the free use of his shore power. Dave went off for a yomp on Slættaratindður (flat peak), which at 880 metres is the highest mountain in the islands.

Wednesday's passage called for an early start to ride the tides around the north of the islands to Klaksvik on Borðoy which, with its population of 5,000, is the second largest town in the islands. The capital Tórshavn has a population of just over 13,000. Lines were slipped at 0621 and Paul treated us to sausage and scrambled egg wraps as soon as we were in the Sundini channel. Sailing for 10 out of the 43nm to Klaksvik, the occasional fog denied us the sight of the magnificent cliffs which fall 750 metres, directly into the sea, at Enniberg. Enniberg is the northernmost point of the Faroe Islands. Full marks to the Raymarine radar for looking after us in the fog. After rounding Enniberg we worked our way southeast before passing through Svinøyarfjørður on our way to Klaksvik. Our tidal planning was robust and we were able to ride a fair or slack tide for the entire passage.

Before entering Klaksvik I had exchanged email with Hávarður Enni, the CA's local representative. Hávarður (pronounced Howard) recommended that we berth in the marina, but before doing so we wanted to take on diesel at the fuel berth. That is when the fun began. The photograph in the SDs does not convey quite how tight is the pool around the fuel berth nor did it show the boats now moored fore and aft of the berth which made it impossible to get *Blue Damsel* into the berth. A helpful local boat owner suggested that we lie alongside a small fishing boat which was just within the reach of the hose on the diesel pump. Our helpful friend later suggested that we use his adjacent wooden jetty and shore power. Whilst the



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diesel pump accepted credit cards, it refused every card we offered. From what looked like the HM's office, but was not, Alan and Paul were redirected to the filling station. There, the lady manager provided a payment card to operate the pump on the fuel berth. Settlement was sorted back at the filling station which accepted our credit card.

Securely berthed on the wooden jetty we discovered that none of our shore power fittings matched that on the jetty before finding a compatible socket within reach of our extended cables. There followed a long walk ashore around the town in search of beer until we were directed to a small bar which lurked behind an insignificant door quite close to our berth. Our opportunity to taste the local beer, brewed in Klaksvík, was not wasted before we worked our way back to the boat for yet another night alongside free of all expense.

On arrival in Tórshavn the HM enquired whether we required customs and immigration clearance, but on being told that we had entered via Vágur was happy for us to pass through the harbour to the visitors' berths near the boat club. We negotiated the tight channel into the shallow pool behind the walkway where we found a vacant finger berth with a small and bouncy finger. We paid



*Blue Damsel alongside in Tórshavn*

for our berth at the pay station and later a club member told us that we could only stay one night because the berths were reserved for a regatta starting the following day. Lunch of beer and omelettes in a waterside café was followed later in the day by a run ashore to a restaurant where the most appetising fare was burgers with chips and salad. Had we been able to use the berth for a second night we might have spent more time in Tórshavn, but the weather apps supported the decision to set out for Stornoway on Friday morning.

In the morning, with only four knots of wind from astern, we motored for the first five hours until the wind got up south of Suðuroy when we were able to raise full sail in 10 knots of wind from just aft of the beam. The wind continued to rise and we progressively shortened sail until it blew a steady F6 during the night with occasional gusts of 28 knots. In quite heavy seas we were able to maintain between

six and seven knots over the ground, which probably gave us as good a passage south as we were ever going to get.

Our experience on the passage out had persuaded me to be more rigorous over the watch system (four hours in daylight and three at night with two dog watches each of two hours from noon on Saturday). We also refined the battery-charging regime, running the engine for the last 15 minutes of one watch and the first 15 minutes of the next watch, which worked well until the wind failed four hours out of Stornoway. After VHF calls to Stornoway CG and the HM we were safely berthed behind the lifeboat by 1930. The crew ran ashore to an Indian restaurant but I decided to indulge my passion for a quiet pint or two of Guinness on a bench outside the Criterion Bar with a healthy portion of fish and chips.

A lazy start back to Ardfern on Sunday morning was followed by a night in Lemreway, Loch Shiel, before a wet 56nm passage, accompanied in part by dolphins, to Plockton where a night at anchor preceded a more agreeable passage to Mallaig. We secured one of the last available pontoon berths at 1430. The following day we managed 41 of the 42nm to Tobermory under sail. We were back in Ardfern by 1330 on 22 June after leaving Tobermory by the Doirlinn and riding a fair tide until reaching the turning tide at the Dorus Mòr at 1240.

We really were incredibly lucky with the weather, unlike those who headed north the year before. The advice from one skipper who visited the Faroe Islands in 2022 was quite simple: "Don't". With that advice so freely given, had it not been for the application of Boyd's Rules, we would never have set off.

Would anybody like to have a lightly-used courtesy ensign? Free to a good home.

Despite the fog, we were incredibly lucky with the weather (on passage to Klaksvik)

