



Skye's the limit

Cadet Cruise 2024

William Eaton

20-27 June 2024



Skipper (on helm) and First Mate Tom Bott

The Cadet Cruise is a highlight of the sailing calendar for many Cadets, and this year was the ninth. Having covered cruising grounds from Atlantic France to Arctic Norway, and the Baltic to Bantry Bay, we returned to the Hebrides, which was the location of the first Cadet Cruise back in 2015. The Cadets have gone from strength to strength in this time, with four attending in 2015 and 17 joining this year to enjoy the Scottish summer. We chartered two yachts from Dunstaffnage: *Eloise* (a Sun Odyssey 43DS) was skippered by William Eaton with nine on board, and *Oceanlord* (a Westerly Oceanlord 41) was skippered by Ben Warnick with eight on board.

We aim to cruise in interesting sailing areas, so they are typically not straightforward to reach on public transport. The adventure begins well before slipping lines, and this year coordinating crew arriving from all corners of the British Isles was a challenge. Adding to the challenge was a global failure of the IT software, CrowdStrike, affecting much of the world's transport infrastructure. Luckily the Scottish train network was not too disrupted, and the full complement had arrived in Dunstaffnage by 1900 on 21 July.

As earlier-arriving crew reserved the best bunks and got to know their crewmates, trips to the supermarket in nearby Oban kicked off in earnest. With two schools of provisioning thought in play, the *Oceanlord* approach was to pick up an assortment of bits and bobs, a couple of drinks, and hope they might find a shop along the way. *Eloise's* strategy took a



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more thorough approach. Their shopping delegation sat outside the supermarket meticulously planning cheese-to-ham and gin-to-tonic ratios. After an hour or two, *Oceanlord's* shoppers meandered back with a couple of bags of shopping, and *Eloise's* crew looked on sceptically. Could they really be sustained by two blocks of cheese and two bottles of gin for eight people? The proof would be in the pudding. No less than four hours after setting off, *Eloise's* provisioning team (Ella, John and Freya) returned with nearly three times as much. After many words of wisdom being passed from the doubtful *Eloise* crew, *Oceanlord* popped out for some additional supplies.

Finally ready to leave, we set off on Sunday morning, heading for Muck. Within half an hour traditional Scottish summer weather settled in. After narrowly avoiding a CalMac ferry, we passed Lady's Rock and sailed up the Sound of Mull in changeable winds, reefing and shaking out again frequently. Visibility was poor and the rain persistent. After passing the north of Mull and eventually reaching clearer airs, the clouds parted. As we left Ardnamurchan in our wake we were sailing to windward in a pleasant WNW4 in the afternoon sun.



Tom Bott helming past Lady's Rock, Firth of Lorn

Eloise settled into the role of being lead boat early in the cruise. We hoped to spend the first night anchored in Muck's SE harbour. We arrived to find a cosy inlet, sadly suffering from a bit of swell which was working its way round the island from the west. It would have made for an uncomfortable night, so we decided to carry on to Eigg just a 4nm close reach away. This was a great decision, offering a beautiful open anchorage, views of the An Sgùrr peak at the top of Eigg, and several seals swimming around us over the course of the evening.

The following morning, with a short hop to Skye planned for the afternoon, we had time for a group walk to the highest point of the island in the morning. An Sgùrr sits at 403m and is a very achievable walk from



Eloise crew on first morning



William Eaton



Eigg walking group:

Galmisdale in three hours (or a little longer if you are Robert Ingram and Jacob Southby-Tailyour, distracted by scrambling on rocks on the way up). Delightful cottages and plenty of friendly cattle dot the route up, and you are treated to an incredible view from the top on a clear day.

After the walk and a quick lunch in the island's community café, we made sail for Loch Scavaig, captivated by the description on Bob Bradfield's incredible Antares Chart. The loch was said to be one of the most impressive anchorages in Scotland. The challenge of being the lead boat was to find a suitable spot to anchor. We tried dropping the hook in the various spots mentioned in the charts and pilot guide and found the narrative to be spot on – there was thick kelp absolutely everywhere! We eventually settled on the eastern side of the loch for the night, surrounded by dramatic high mountains and yet more inquisitive seals circling around us.

Three days in, some members of the crew were yearning for a shore-based adventure. Having been dreaming of Gaelic mythological creatures and rugged mountain scenery a plan was hatched to carry a dinghy up to a loch above the anchorage and explore the 'inland' waterways of Skye. Before first light (and under strict instruction to return for breakfast at 0800), Tom Bott, Arthur Bott, George Bush and John Dunlop set off without waking a soul on board. What happened at the loch stays at the loch, but stories made their way back to the boat of very puzzled campers who saw a group of oilskin-clad men with a dinghy and outboard in the early hours of the morning.



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Skye dinghy adventure

My parents had sung the praises of Café Canna, the nearby island's café which is famous amongst many members. I had been told about its beautiful setting and the enormous fresh langoustine on their seafood platter. How could we possibly miss out on that? We had a quick beat over the northern shore of Rum before arriving in Canna Harbour after lunch. We had been trying to get hold of the Café to book ourselves in for a seafood feast, and were disappointed to find we were there for their only day off – just our luck. At least we were still able to walk to the southeast side of Sanday to watch the youthful puffins swooping and circling over their favoured rock. Life is not so bad after all.

The forecast for the following couple of days indicated a strengthening southerly wind, so we made for the north coast of Mull hoping for some better holding and a spot of shelter. *Oceanlord* opted to stay a little longer at Canna to explore a cliff-jumping spot on the island. As is often the way, the wind filled in towards the forecast levels shortly after we set off, earlier than anticipated, and what followed was a rather long day to windward. The frustration of a one-week charter is always the need to return in the back of your mind. We persevered through the short sea, hiding from much of the swell as we passed with Coll to windward of us.



Skipper Will and (L-R) Ella Dunlop, George Bush, Freya Spencer & Joshua Trickett passing Rum

Oceanlord's crew evidently had an even longer day, supposing that lead boat *Eloise* had sent them the long way around Rum. Nevertheless, encouraged by the good holding and shelter from the south in Loch Mingary, both crews sang shanties and drank cups of tea as the Mull mizzle set in. After *Eloise* arrived in the narrow, low-lying loch on Mull's north coast we dressed up for a celebratory



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drinks party that Tom Bott had decided to host in the cockpit in the rain. Shirts compulsory, no oilskins – it was a drinks party of course! After debriefing later that evening, it became clear the crew of *Oceanlord* had misunderstood the day's plan and gone north of Rum rather than south, arriving several hours later and missing out on the drinks party fun.

The attraction of a hot shower and a wander in Tobermory was too great so we made a short diversion on our way south the next day, taking advantage of the free visitor berths for stays up to four hours. After the disappointment of missing out on a seafood feast at Canna, both crews were determined to source some local mussels before returning home. We sailed back down the

Sound of Mull to Loch Spelve where the mussel farmers leave a couple of bags out each day for passing yachts. The scenery through the Sound is dramatic,



Drinks party on arrival at Mull



Sailing into Loch Spelve



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Drinks party. L-R: Tom Bott, Joshua Trickett, John Dunlop, Ella Dunlop, Freya Spencer, George Bush, Will Eaton, Arthur Bott

passing close to the many headlands with valleys tumbling above along the way. The wind was falling down all the gullies on the island making for some very active sail handling, just as we had experienced on our way north earlier in the week. We must have shaken out and then re-reefed at least five times over the passage.

We arrived in Loch Spelve as the sun was setting over the hills and anchored in the northern corner with the blissful sound of sheep and waterfalls. Tom and Arthur Bott and George Bush were sent ashore and returned with a 5kg bag full of enormous, hotly anticipated fresh mussels which we planned to cook up the following day for lunch. As this was our final night outside a marina, the crews of both yachts got together to share a tipples or two in the evening. The crew of *Oceanlord* had even written a song about *Eloise's* crew to the tune of 'Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory' which was performed with glee after a few more tipples. Those who attended the 2024 Beaulieu Meet evening sing song enjoyed (if that is the right word) a raucous rendition.

Surprisingly for a charter boat, we had not needed to charge the batteries all week despite doing relatively few engine hours on passage. However, during supper the cabin lights began to flicker, so we reluctantly ran the engine for a charge. However, the inevitable happened overnight at some point, and we woke in the morning to a very warm fridge. Disaster! The fresh mussels of the previous day were a little warmer than one might prefer. With all crew facing long journeys home a day later we felt it was not worth the risk so the mussels were bitterly returned to the bottom of the loch where they had been fished from just a day before.

A final sunny dash was made across the Sound of Mull back to Dunstaffnage marina to close off an excellent cruise. The crews of the two boats came together for a meal ashore at the marina restaurant, sharing a dram and swapping stories after a fantastic week. We were so lucky to be able to enjoy relatively good weather, fantastic sailing every day and only a little bit of rain here and there. Most of all, we were fortunate to have the generous support of the Noel Marshall Cruising Fund. The Cadets are forever grateful for the opportunities his fund provides.