

Almost as Good as Scotland

Hamble to the Hebrides and back

Katharine and Peter Ingram

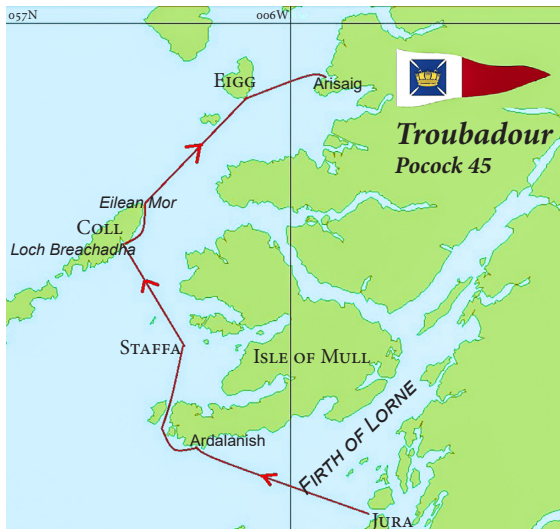
Awarded the Juno's Cup



Charlotte, Robert, Katharine and Peter Ingram on Taransay

It has become a family adage. Wherever we are in the world, however wonderful, majestic, astounding and perfect the scene, we would often share a look, remark on the spectacle and end up with “This is almost as good as Scotland!”. Finally, after twenty years cruising elsewhere, it was time to re-calibrate our recollections of cruising paradise.

The disruptions of COVID-19 at least meant we had holiday to spare. Four weeks’ leave available, but neither of us could take it all at once, so we settled on a two plus two solution. Two weeks to get up to Scotland, two weeks back at work, two weeks to get the



Katharine and Peter Ingram



Charlotte relaxing in the Irish Sea

boat home again. The Solent to the Outer Hebrides and back - that was the aim. We left the River Hamble 10 July, as soon as Robert (16) and Charlotte (13) had broken up from school.

A south easterly helped us some of the way down channel, and we had reasonable tacks into the generally northerly winds after rounding Land's End. We were off SE Ireland when the high pressure really settled. Both Robert & Charlotte stood their watches single-handed this summer, so we had a gentle dash up the Irish Sea;

Troubadour and Minnesinger in Ardanish



Almost as Good as Scotland

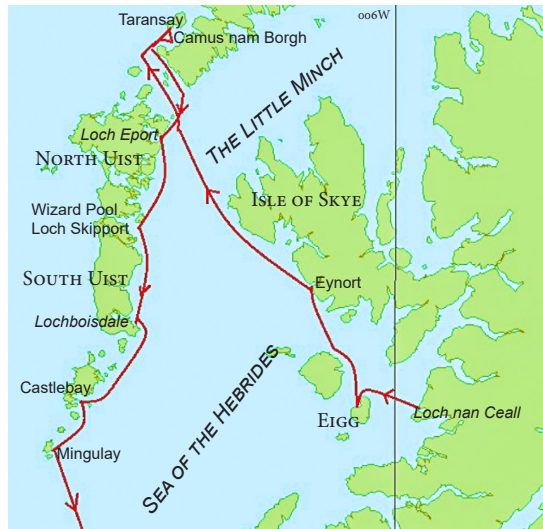
sometimes sailing, sometimes motoring. We anchored off the cliffs south of Peel on the Isle of Man for a day of basking, walking and swimming and then continued motoring north. The Ardmere Islands off Islay were our first stop in Scotland and a wonderful romp to the saddle of one of the Paps of Jura gave us all the exercise we were craving. We touched base with the RCC in Loch na Ceall and then pressed on north again. Amongst the motoring under the well establish high pressure, every day found us a bit of breeze and we cycled through the sail wardrobe by degrees.

Scotland really hit home when we stopped at a cove just west of Ardanish, on the Ross of Mull. After a couple of hours motoring in flat calm the northerly breeze picked up and we set the drifter and then the genoa as we beat into the northern arm of the anchorage and dropped on the white sand bottom with just enough room to swing. It is one of the most beautiful anchorages we've ever stopped in, and a superb supply of firewood for a barbeque to boot. We were happy that we could now get *Minnesinger* (Troubadour's plywood nesting sailing dinghy) afloat and rigged in just fifteen minutes.

From here we pressed on, with marvellous mirages around, through the Sound of Iona for a quick stop at Fingal's Cave on Staffa. The calm weather meant the children could dinghy right to the head of the cave and experience the cathedral like basalt; their turn to be amazed, like everyone else before them. It was from here that the wildlife really started to astonish. The dominate bird of the trip seemed to be the Manx Shearwater, rafting in thousands on the water or in groups swooping gracefully over the sea. On Lunga it was the cormorant families, masses of guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes and, of course, puffins.

Between anchorages at Loch Breachadha and the beautiful pool southeast of Eilean Mor off the top end of Coll, we had a spectacular display of 200 or so dolphins. They took it in turns to break from hunting to play around the boat, we had up to about thirty dolphins close to at any one time. And around Eilean Mor, the gentle weather meant we could explore the beautiful islands in the dinghy, accompanied by the population of resident seals.

As it turned out we did make it to our planned destination of Arisaig by 24 July. But we hadn't been confident enough to make pre-emptive arrangements to leave the boat there and the



Katharine and Peter Ingram

moorings were fully booked. So instead we positioned ourselves on the south side of Loch nan Ceall, laid two anchors in a good spread on a single rising chain and dinghied ashore in pea soup fog at 0500 to meet a Glasgow taxi in a prearranged 'passing place' on the shore road.

We kept a good eye on the weather and thank heavens we weren't pinged by the Covid app when we were back at work for the next two weeks. We travelled back up to Scotland on the Friday evening train and were delivered back by the same taxi driver at 0330, happy to find the dinghy still lying deep in the bracken and ready to start the second part of the holiday.

We headed off again on Saturday afternoon, stopping at the 'singing' beaches on NW Eigg and then up to Loch Eynort on Skye, under the soaring gaze of white-tailed eagles. Late, in the pitch dark night Peter noticed the phosphorescent activity around the boat. The family were roused and there followed the most phosphorescent midnight snorkelling session we've ever experienced. Even at depth the phosphorescence continued and the lead line could be seen perfectly clearly, sweeping ethereal curtains well below 5m. Astounding ... only in Scotland.

We were keen to cover ground before a series of low pressure systems moved in, so we pushed on north. After a good beat up the Minch we anchored in the Opsay basin in the Sound of Harris and then pushed out to Taransay. Twenty years earlier we had become engaged on this island, under a full moon and with the sandy bottom glowing below us. We were keen to return and show it to the children and are happy to report that it is still absolutely spot on; although our family swim ashore and running about on the beach (long jump competition, rather randomly) was cut short by the arrival of a party of sea kayakers and we had to swim back to the boat to put some clothing on!

The weather then began to take over and we moved across to the beach off Camus nam Borgh just ahead of a strong south easterly coming in. After it blew through, we sailed back through the Sound of Harris and down to the good looking shelter of Bagh a Bhiorian, on the south shore of Loch Eport, ready for the next gale.

We were surprised over breakfast when the two CQRs, connected in tandem, let go very suddenly. The Fortress kedge didn't hold either, so we added the 100lb fisherman on another rode and lay to that as the wind picked up. It was an exciting day all around; we had to climb to the top of nearby Burrival hill in the blustery conditions to get phone and email reception to pick up Robert's GCSE results.

Once the gale had abated a bit we beat down to Wizard Pool in Loch Skipport, where the gusts coming off the nearby hills compelled us to again assemble the big fisherman anchor and toss it over the side. Thank god for cruising with teenaged children, what would we do without them?

We knew we had to head south soon, but were determined to leave Scotland from Mingulay. More nostalgic memories of cruising together on *Sai See* twenty years ago and again, years ago. It did not disappoint. Not only were there fifty or more curious seals in the bay, the evocative abandoned village, the diving-bombing

Almost as Good as Scotland



Mingulay

great skuas whose domain is definitely the flat plain at the top of the island, but the sheer cliffs at Bagh nah-Aoineig on the west coast of the island are absolutely breath taking. We upped anchor and left Scotland that Sunday evening. Perfect weather, with a strong NW and the rain squalls coming over, gave us a dramatic evening light over Barra Head. The run across to the North Channel and down the Irish Sea was tremendous. Charlotte's 14th Birthday happened right in the middle, so we made birthday cake on board and had homemade pizza for supper. Comments from the children in the log of 'Dad asleep, the boat is mine!!' showed how they had grown in confidence.

We made the 470nm to Mousehole in just under three days, anchoring off the harbour and making it ashore for dinner. The wonderful Hole Foods Deli on the quay took pity and squeezed us in, despite the back-to-back reservations that Cornwall seemed to have. We had a phenomenal meal to celebrate Charlotte's birthday, Robert's exam results and a hugely satisfactory holiday, looking out across the harbour to our yacht quietly at anchor.

After an exciting stop in Plymouth to see the fireworks competition, we had an excellent run up the Channel and back to our berth on the Hamble River on Sunday; revelling in the afterglow of an excellent holiday and the finest mix of weather, wildlife and the wonderful world that is most perfectly defined in Scotland.