

# A Summer of Two Firsts

David Ridout

The first first was the fact that this was our first cruise in our new ‘motor boat’, *Pilgrim*: a big change after the thousands of miles Annette and I have cruised under sail. *Pilgrim* is a 37’ LWL, 39’ LOA, Nordic Tug, made near Seattle in the USA. She is powered by one, big Cummins diesel of 380hp and is technically a semi-displacement boat. Doing her max of 18kts her 1,200 litres of fuel would go very quickly. Doing 7kts she has a range of 1,500nm. We find 8kts is a happy compromise and at this speed we average under a litre a mile. Her electronically controlled engine is happy to run at 30% output for hours and days on end. I give these details as those of us used to sailing yachts are not always aware of the economics of ‘the dark side’. This latter description is to my mind very inaccurate. Having spent



*Pilgrim* in Crinan Canal

years descending into a darkish cave, albeit a very attractive one, we now live looking out at the world from our main saloon.

Enough detail. Late on the evening of 25 June I left our berth with my brother, John, and Nick Walford, a local friend. We dropped the hook behind Start Point for three hours to await a favourable tide, then late in the afternoon the next day, we anchored again in the outer reaches of the Helford River. After a pleasant, calm night we left at the civilised

time of 1030 for a tide beneficial for rounding the Lizard and Lands End. I mention this as so often one is cursing the tide when it requires a 00!!, something awful start. An easy night at sea was followed by the weak point of motor boats, a lumpy sea on the beam. This produces not a roll but an unpleasant, jerky motion, which is somewhat improved by our small steadying sail. I have since learnt that a 'cheque book retreat' can also improve the situation. If one cranks up the speed to 10/11kts the motion is much better. The fuel consumption is not.

Late afternoon found us tying up in Dun Laohgaire. Stepping out of our warm, dry cabin, we got a taste of things to come. It was cold, a light drizzle was falling and two days of strong winds and much rain kept us in port. We used the commuter train which runs a very good service just a few hundred yards from the marina. Dublin was visited, so was Greystones, a coastal town in the other direction.

Dublin was grey and rather run-down from my memories of a visit many years ago, however, an excellent meal of seafood washed down served by a Irish girl made enjoyable than

An anchorage and a night followed. Then, wind blowing, out of the west, Mull of Kintyre to East Loch

we would need to transit the Crinan Canal, which both my crew mates were keen to do, as it would be a first for them. Twelve of the fifteen locks have to be worked manually by oneself, which can be hard, slow work,



with Guinness and very pretty chatty the afternoon more the morning.

to await a foul tide in Bangor Marina with a strong west we decided to opt windward side, of the and went up the east Tarbert. This meant

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but we were lucky to transit the first half with another yacht which had an active, fit crew as I did. We stopped for the night and enjoyed country walks and a good meal in the Cairnbarn Hotel.

Next day we finished the Canal and, with some days in hand before we were due in Ardfern, we turned left and went south out of the canal with the intention of rounding Jura. Motoring gently down the east side of Jura, we poked our nose into several anchorages, but ended up in Craighouse on its south-east corner. Perhaps the whisky distillery there had something to do with our choice. So, with a long walk, the purchase of whisky and a peaceful night behind us, we went up through the narrows which separate the islands of Jura and Islay. The sun shone on this truly beautiful landscape and on the Paps of Jura, which for the previous two days we had been seeing in many different lights. Exploring began as we entered into Loch Tarbert, a five-mile inlet which almost bisects Jura. We made it most of the way, but had to forego the final mile. The tide was not high enough and we could not wait, as we needed to go north to get through the infamous Gulf of Corryvreckan at slack tide. This proved to be a slight anti-climax as a combination of slack tide and little wind made for a complete lack of the usual whirlpools and upwellings of water. The Dorus Mor was also fairly peaceful, so it was a relaxed crew that tied up in Ardfern Marina at the head of Loch Craignish in mid-afternoon. 89 hours on the engine, 650nm on the log and 10 days since we left Lymington.

The second first occurred next day, 6 July. Sandy Walford and Annette arrived by car bringing with them Coco, our working cocker spaniel. We were to cruise with a dog on board. John left for



My two ladies

the south by train and a very enjoyable week of cruising followed with Nick, Sandy, Annette and myself, plus Coco. We had what turned out to be the best weather of the whole trip. Highlights were a day motoring round and through the Treshnish Islands at low water with their abundance of puffins, seals, and many types of seabirds. A lovely, wilderness anchorage in Craigaig Bay on the south of Ulva, a sunny visit to Coll and a trip to

Staffa come to mind. There was a large swell the day we went to Staffa, so a dinghy trip into Fingal's Cave was not on; we had previously done this and it was an awe-inspiring experience. Also, alas, I had not recorded the Hebridean Overture and, with no telephone 3G, I was unable to play it as we motored past.

During this time we discovered one of the minus points of cruising in Scotland with a dog. Many of the lovely uninhabited anchorages have no easy way ashore. Coco and I got very used to scrambling over acres of seaweed strewn rocks last thing at night and first thing in the morning. She thought this was heaven, I was not so sure, especially when it was raining. The other point to note is that there are comparatively few footpaths on many of the islands, so a walk is undertaken through waist

high heather and bracken. She loved the shoreline, adored scrambling up and down near vertical hillsides and at the end of two months was of a level of fitness I never thought was possible for any



A rare lovely evening - but getting ashore!

creature. The dinghy was her second home and the sight of her standing with her front paws on the dinghy tubes and her ears flying in the wind as she sniffed the approaching land is something I will always remember with happiness.

Sandy and Nick left us in Tobermory for an interesting bus, ferry and train journey back to Lymington.

After two days of gales Annette and I left Tobermory and moved north. A series of anchorages, plus the interest of passing through Kyle Rhea with its seven knot tides, brought us to Pull Domhain a delightful anchorage on the mainland opposite Skye. This we enjoyed in the company of *Dafony*, with Mike and Liz Redfern, a well-known Lymington and RCC cruising duo, on board. Here, Annette combined an outboard failure, strong wind, oars that were stowed long-term, and a dog desperate to get ashore into a little drama. This was at about 0700, not the usual time Mike Redfern is used to getting out of bed. My shouts prevailed and he in his dinghy was the gallant saviour of my crew, both of them.

We both decided to go to Loch Shildaig at the head of Loch Torridon. *Dafony* left first and enjoyed a reach in a brisk ESE wind in calm water up the coast. The wind was all the time strengthening. We caught them up as



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we turned SE into the wind at the entrance of Torridon. *Pilgrim* happily shouldered her way into what was by now a 30kt headwind. Mike and Liz beat into this. As the loch narrowed and the hills surrounded us we found ourselves with 52kts on the anemometer and when we got to Shildaig it was still blowing 30-plus. We admitted defeat and turned round but first looked into upper Loch Torridon hoping to find more sheltered waters. It was worse, pure white water everywhere. I subsequently discovered that Loch Torridon with its backdrop of spectacular mountains is known for its down-draughts in east winds. We learnt that two very senior RCC members have had nasty times there. *Dafony* and *Pilgrim* beat a retreat up the coast to Badachro.



Mike and Liz Redfern join us

So the days passed. We went north to Ullapool via a visit by Annette and the Redferns to Inverewe Gardens in sunshine. I stayed on board



David, Annette and Coco at the Callenish Stones on Lewis

or rather on the rocky seaweed strewn shore as dogs, even on a lead, are not allowed in the gardens. After sitting out more inclement weather for a day in Ullapool, we enjoyed a rare sunny calm day in the Summer Isles and then, with more unsettled weather forecast, gave up going north and crossed the Minch to Stornaway.

We were trapped by weather in Stornaway for a week, but time passed happily enough. We drove with the Redferns up to the Butt of Lewis and the port of Ness and then south to South Harris. For a brilliant description of this part of the world I recommend the Lewis Trilogy, by Peter May. These books give a good insight into life on Harris and Lewis. One of the great joys of the cruising life is the wide variety of people you meet. We gave a 'drink and nibbles' evening on *Pilgrim* and I was the only British-born person on board. French, American, Swedish and Danish nationalities were represented. One of our guests was an Alaskan-born

lady whose mother was German and who was now working as a *sous chef* specialising in aperitif pastries in a German, Michelin-starred restaurant. Her contribution to the evening was both delightful in taste and sight, not to mention her cheery personality. The French couple were in a typically bare, aluminium vessel and are planning on doing the North-West Passage next year. I have given them my Chairman's copy of 'Arctic and Northern Waters' produced by the RCCPF. This has gone down very well. Interestingly enough they did not know of its existence, but have now promised to send in any potential updates.

I will not go on into detail, but mention a few high and low lights. We visited the now deserted cove where Gavin Maxwell wrote about Tarka the otter. His croft is a boarded-up ruin. We saw otters further up Loch Hourn. In Mallaig we bought fresh lobsters directly from the local fisherman berthed near



RCC meet inside - and out!

us. We also met a circumnavigator who, like us, had spent over nine years away and had covered many of the places we visited. We had much to reminisce over. Janny Bernays, who had sailed with us

in the RCC Finnish meet, joined us and through her connections from a past life we met many lovely people and visited some stunning houses. We endured endless rain and wind. Scotland alas was having one of its worst summers anyone could remember. I wanted to walk round Loch Coruisk, but the river going down to our anchorage in Scavaig was far too dangerous to cross. Before, when we had visited, it had been a trickle. The Royal Cruising Club Meet in Ardfarn never left port due to the weather, but the yard shed made a fun setting for some great parties and BBQs. We went through the Cuan Sound where the tide is so strong the water goes slightly downhill. A great experience, especially with 380hp in hand, but the visibility was so bad in driving rain that little of this was seen.

After another transit of the Crinan Canal, we set about exploring the Clyde and its regions. The Kyles of Bute, where my mother had cruised on her father's motor boat as a child in the '20s, was visited. So was

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Rothsay Harbour, from where we made a visit to Mount Stuart House. This was a huge success and is well worth the effort to get there, especially if you can take a private tour of this extraordinary building. We anchored in Loch Goil off Carrick Castle near where the nuclear subs are refuelled and we went up to see Faslane from the water before coming to rest in Rhu Marina.

From Rhu Annette, Janny and Coco departed by car and I was joined by Nigel Reid (RCC).

He and I left on the morning of 30 August for Ardrrossan, where three hours later in hot sunshine we picked up Dick Moore, a friend from Lymington who Annette and I



Wonderful wildlife everywhere

had originally met in the Caribbean as we both circumnavigated at the same time. By midday the three of us were at sea heading south. Ailsa Craig, the Mull of Galloway and the Isle of Man were passed. I remember an unpleasant few hours with a brisk beam wind and sea during which I did the afore-mentioned cheque book retreat and pushed the speed up to 10kts giving much less motion. This was only necessary for a few hours.



A busy night with many ships and fishing boats followed. Next day in sunshine and calm seas we passed St David's Head and its outlying islands, followed by the island of Grassholm, with its white cap of guano and millions of gannets. A peaceful night followed and dawn brought us to the Longships. Passing the Runnelstone reminded me of the time we had spent anchored off it with not a breath of wind and a u/s engine in our Swan, *Born Free*. After a busy day and half a night crossing the Channel shipping lanes, 0130 on Saturday morning found us tying up in a crowded St Peter Port, 550 miles



and 65 hours from Rhu. As a skipper having such a competent crew meant that two hours on and four off gave plenty of sleep and with both crew members vying to outdo each other in the galley, we ate very well.

The main reason for the 40nm diversion to Guernsey was their sensible attitude to fuel prices at the dock in St Sampsons. This we visited at 0700 on Monday morning before a pleasant twelve-hour trip to Lymington where we were met by our wives and much was discussed over an 'anchor dram'. We all agreed that on a good day Scotland is unbeatable for beauty. On all days the people of the West are very friendly and cruising there is in many ways what cruising further south used to be, when it was less crowded and in most anchorages meeting another yacht was the cause of a good drink or two together.

Thus our first serious cruise under motor, 2,080 miles logged, came to an end. *Pilgrim* had behaved very well. She had kept us dry and warm in very inclement conditions. Mechanically she had behaved perfectly and had shown herself to be a very able vessel. Even doing the occasional few hours of 10kts, we had used just less than a litre per mile for the whole trip.

Our second first, Coco, was a delight most of the time. She took to the life very well, even if her owners found wet, late night or early morning trips ashore irritating at times. Harsh weather and general cruising life tends to put the alcohol consumption up and her presence compensated somewhat as she caused us to take a lot of strenuous exercise. Passages are not her thing as she stubbornly refuses to use our aft deck for relief! Early house training not on a boat no doubt.

We look forward to many more cruises in *Pilgrim* both with and without Coco, but will probably search out a bit less rain, wind and cold, even if this means less stunning scenery.