

Rothesay to Cromarty

Finlay Crawford had wanted a boat for a number of years and had been actively looking for one. A Mitchell 31 appeared in "Find a Fishing Boat" and after a few phone calls and a visit to see the boat "Susie Anna" he agreed to buy it.

Once the deal was done he decided he needed an experienced sailor/navigator to help him bring it home to Cromarty and asked me to accompany him.

Monday 2nd August 2010.

Fin had arranged to pick me up at 0900 in Cromarty and then pick up his mate Martin from Culbokie, Martin would drive Fin's car back from Rothesay.

We were on the main A9 at Tore by 0945 and heading south, hoping to arrive at around 1400. The first problem was that the engine management in his car told us his oil was getting low and we pulled into Aviemore to buy a grossly overpriced can of lub oil.

The next stop was Perth for a cup of coffee and a pie and a toilet stop then on the road again. Traffic was a little heavier than we anticipated and with the Road Works outside Cumbernauld slowing us further the "Tom Tom" Sat Nav told us we would not be in Rothesay until 1445.

We caught the 1400 Ferry at Wemyss Bay in time to be over at the harbour for that expected time. When Fin presented himself at the door of the house he found that he had only sent a cheque for the deposit and the lady (quite rightly) would not release the boat keys until the balance was paid.

Fin then frantically visited the local branch of his bank and tried to arrange for the funds to be released, very time consuming and a little frustrating. Martin and I sat in the car thinking we might be driving all the way home again.

With the money now in his hands we returned to the house, over an hour later than planned paid the money and quickly set off down to the waterside to launch the dinghy. Fin set off for the boat lying at anchor while Martin and I went round to the Marina where we offloaded all the gear allowing Martin to catch the next Ferry at 1645.

I stood by the gear watching the Ferry arrive and hoping that Fin would have the sense to wait until the Ferry docked before attempting to enter the harbour, I was relieved to see him take a turn around allowing the Ferry to dock before coming in, alas he was 20 seconds too soon as the red lights were still showing.

The harbour Master came down to have a word with him. He had owned the boat for all of 10 minutes and was already on a warning!!

We loaded all the gear aboard and made her ready for sea before retiring to the local for a few beers.

The original plan was to sail round the top of Kyle through "Burnt Isles" but as there was a tidal gate which would mean waiting until around 0900 we decided to sail round the bottom of Kyle which would allow to start at 0500.

Tuesday 3rd August 2010.

We were up at around 0445 and after a quick cup of tea we set sail just after 0500.

The wind was very light from the west but due to increase as the day progressed. We made excellent time and although the trip to the south would mean an extra 3 miles onto the journey the decision was the right call. Crossing Inch Marnock water was a little bumpy but once we were into Lower Loch Fyne in the lee of the land the water flattened out again allowing us to make a steady 7 knots and we arrived at Ardrisahaig at 1005. Another boat arrived at the same time as us and we thought it would be assistance going through the canal as we could share the work off opening the lock gates (all done by hand), unfortunately they seemed to be in no hurry to transverse the canal, two boats coming the other way (one single handed) were of a similar "laid back" attitude and held us up even more than we wanted.

We eventually shook them off and made our way through with no assistance from anyone else.

Fin stayed on the boat (I had managed to take a chip out of his bow on the first lock!) and I did the lock gates. I don't mind admitting that the task is difficult for a 67 year old arthritic!!

However we managed to get most of the way through before we ran out of time at 1700 at a point called Bellanoch Bridge. As there was no pub here we were a bit disappointed but after a bite to eat (some of Fin's precooked Venison) , a shower and a couple of glasses of wine we were quite content. I started to rework my figured for the next day to get round 'Dorus Mhor' and was alarmed to discover that we could not cross at the time I had first said (1000) and it would be afternoon before we could round the point, the more I looked at it the worse it became, I said I would leave it until I felt fresh in the morning. As we were both so tired we hit the sack at around 2100.

Wednesday 4th August 2010.

I slept right through to 0600 and made my way over to the showers, on my return Fin trotted off for a shower as I made breakfast. With breakfast out of the way I got the Almanac out and looked at tide times etc for setting off.

Fin had already resigned himself to waiting until the afternoon but was delighted when I told him that my first calculations were indeed correct and we should be at 'Dorus Mhor' for 1000.

As soon as the lock keeper appeared we were on our way again and cleared the canal at Crinan by 0945. The distance from the canal to the sound of Jura is only 4NM so the journey to there was only around 20 minutes. As soon as we entered the sound the tide picked us up and increased our speed by over a knot and kept increasing as we motored up to the sound of Luing.

We carried the tide all the way up past, Luing then Seil until we were level with the Kererra arriving there at Low Water Oban , this would mean that the tide would now be in our favour up Loch Linne and through Corran Narrows.

Salad sandwiches for lunch were made by Fin and went down very well

The day's trip was uneventful and quite pleasant with the light winds. The only thing I found a bit irritating was the noise of the 6 cylinder ford thumping away all day. At one point I suggested that Fin might want to call his new acquisition 'Foisie Nucker.

As we approached Fort William I radioed Corpach to find that the lock gates were open for us, we motored straight in and were tied up in the Basin by 1655.

After a meal on board we wandered up the town to find a pub and shared a few beers with the yacht that had entered the basin after us. They had hired the Jeanneau 42 'Skua' for a week and had entered the basin as a safe haven berth for the night.. they asked for ideas for an overnight in Loch Linne before returning the boat the next again day I suggested Kentallen Bay or Loch Aline .

We returned to the boats after the 'last Orders' were shouted in the bar, the crew from the yacht had ordered a Chinese carry out for delivery after they returned on board. Fin and I returned to 'Susie Anna' turning in as soon as we were on board.

Thursday 5th August 2010

We arranged to start moving as soon as we could but had to wait for the Banavie Lock Down, we went up the first lock into the reach and waited at the Rail bridge for the boats coming out of the 'Neptune's Staircase' the bridge opened to reveal the boats emerging from the bottom lock. One of our club members < Peter Baxter was in the Lock with his boat 'Red Ruth' a Rustler 42 he and his partner Lorraine were taking it down to Falmouth for the winter before heading for the Med in Spring of 2011.

Peter seemed to take for ever to come out of the lock and the others behind him were also taking their time! We were anxious to get up the flight and away to Fort Augustus to get the last lock down of the day so as to be ready for going up Loch Ness first thing in the morning.

There was another boat with us in the lock a Seal 28 'Trilogy' he was obviously in no hurry either and seemed to take great delight in taking his time into each lock. Even after we were clear of the staircase he hung back for the bridges and other locks adding unnecessary time to our travel. We eventually got clear of him and felt we were at last making a fair speed, this was not to last as we came upon another yacht at Laggan Locks, 'Hotspur', a Leisure 23 SL, who was probably going as fast as he could but again we had to wait for him at Cullochey Lock for a further five minutes We asked the lock keeper to radio or phone ahead to Fort Augustus to let them know we wanted down the flight today. Again at Kytra we had to wait for

‘Hotspu’ and the lock keeper there informed us that the last lock down of the day had already started at the flight. We had missed it by ten minutes!

After buying a fish supper and returning to the boat, Fin did a bit of fishing and I had a nap. At around 2000 we walked down to the Royal British Legion Club but as I was not feeling too great we left after only two drinks, I was in bed by 2130.

Friday 6th August 2010.

The first Lock down was scheduled for 0800 but in fact did not start until around 0820, as soon as we reached the bottom of the flight we motored out into Loch Ness and started on the last leg home, it took us three hours to travel up the Loch and as we approached Dochgarroch I tried to Radio the lock keeper, no answer.

On arriving at the lock he took us in and told us we had to wait for the ‘Jacobite Queen’ to arrive, another ten minutes wasted!!

By the time we cleared that Lock and pulled over so that the ‘Queen’ could go first, then pushing our way past a bunch of ‘Caley Crushers’ we tried to get to the Tomnahurich bridge and through to Muirton. The Highland Council now dictate the opening times of bridges in and around Inverness so we had a 20 minute wait before the bridge opened. When we got to Muirton they staff were on their ‘Lunch Break’ and we could not lock down until 1400, again they were 10 minutes late and seemed to relish holding us back. Once through the basin we quickly went through the last two locks into the salt water again at 1515. The tide was just reaching slack water at low tide and we had a smooth passage under the bridge, passing Jock Wingate doing his Dolphin Tours just after the bridge. An uneventful passage from there to Cromarty arriving at 1745, we offloaded all my gear where Lilly met us at the harbour with the car and after helping Fin pick up a mooring in the bay I went home to the grankids , a meal and a night in my own bed.

During the trip Fin asked lots of question about navigation , rules of the road and general seamanship, I suggested some good reading for him and have agreed to give him more tuition on the navigation side during the winter . He is a practical, intelligent and responsible man and will make a good skipper.

George Selvester
14/8/10