

Log of Hi Spirit Saturday 26th August to Wedns 6th Sept.
2017

Fahan to Kyles of Lochash and back to Ballycastle. More of a culinary tour than a cruise....The author believes in what Oscar Wilde called the "inalienable right of the artist to describe accurately that which has never happened...."

DAY ONE.

Words like disparate, eclectic and motley spring to mind to describe the crew of Hi Spirit gathered on the Rathmullan pontoon at 7.00 am on Saturday morning. The boat is an Elan 340-the nautical equivalent of a Porsche 911. The skipper is Donal Mc Bride, who would be equally at home punching up Stirling Moss' rear on an Alpine Pass in the same 911. He only knows two speeds, either on land or sea; full ahead and stop. His first mate is John Mc Monagle, late of Ballina, Co. Mayo and of a more sedate disposition, having been schooled by Norman Fullam in the more leisurely art of long distance ventures on Norman's full keeled, blue water Cape Dory 30-"Somers Isle". The triumvirate is made up by Danny Turnbull, a renowned single-hander, noted for popping over to France on his Mulroy Bay 27-footer during his lunch break.

Just a puff of wind as we made our way through Inistrahull, Danny's back yard. Engine purring at 2500 revs, jib filling, we had 10.5 knots on the clock. (Photographic evidence available) Arrived Port Ellen at 16.00.

I opine we would have been there before lunch if young Luke, the skipper's number three son, a keen type, had not changed the racing jib for the Dacron in about a minute and a half the evening before. I further opine that this Mc Bride chiseller must have cut his teeth, doing tyre changes for his uncle Cathal Curley, during the Circuit of Ireland Rally. A speedy lot, these Mc Brides. Young Charlie, a single minded Turk, on a previous sojourn to Caledonia, was heard to cry out in his sleep " ...spinnaker, Grandad, Spinnaker". Catch them young.....

The crew, trenchermen of the first order, made short work of the best that 'Sea Salt' the local chipper could provide. Locals queuing out the door for take away- a good omen.

A word to the unwary- moor nose out to the weather and as far out on the pontoons as you can to get away from noisy refrigerated trucks and bright lights on the quay.

Day Two. Sunday 27/8

Wet-poor visibility which cleared as we got to the top of Islay. Flew up the sound of Jura in a southerly F5. The sun came out, we dried out and settled in for a great sail. Arrived Craobh Haven 19.00 Wi Fi is Craobh 15. Berth near the clubhouse for a good signal. Alastair, assisted by Sue, is a warm, welcoming and witty manager of the marina. They have gas £28.50 and the take away chips from the pub were excellent. Beautiful Drascombe Lugger on the inner pontoon. John did a tour of all the boats as soon as we hit the dock. Some might say nose-ye calls it curiosity. Reported back to skipper on the dearth of deck bunnies....

Day 3. Depart 10.15-we are on our holliers after all. Wind South Westerly again. Up the Sound of Luing and across open water in heavy swell to peaceful haven of Lough Shelva for lunch. Maze of fish farms on the way in. Beware of Mushroom Rock near the entrance. We borrowed the laird's mooring for lunch and nap. Elderly crew members had to be accommodated. Young Danny is a voracious reader and was happily ensconced with a magnum opus of some 30 volumes, while the suppurating snores of the elders wafted across the peaceful lough. Away again with two reefs and half a jib in gusts of 25 to 30 knots-wake up time. As things quieted down in the Sound of Mull, we shook out the reefs just in time to be put on our ears by the venturi effects through the gaps in the hills. Then all duck or no dinner; headed, donkey on and arrived Tobermory at 19.15. Further words to the unwary, especially those with short legs. Hang your fenders very low and watch out for the high step up from the pontoon, especially if the stitching in your nether garments is suspect. Loo is 20p and shower is £2, for which you get 3 minutes, so tarry not with your ablutions. Closes at 21.00.

Day Four. Wedns 30/8. The bakery, owned by the local castle, does an excellent breakfast bap, not to mention all kinds of pies, cakes and esoteric delights like Haggis Tart, which to this writer's untutored palate, is a pale imitation of our Irish white pudding. Refuelled 65 litres. We seem to be doing 2.5 litres per hour, if not a bit more. The local garage come down to the dock to dispense-minimum 30 litres to make the walk, so topper - uppers beware. Depart 12.15 toward Loch Sunart (Note the lethargy of the Highlands creeping in to affairs-no dawn chorus on this vessel-yet). Beautiful, stunning scenery, I do not exaggerate. New pontoon at Salen, very helpful and welcoming management with all the trimmings. Keep to starboard on the

way in-marker is not very clear. Shop, tearooms, hotel and great walks. Danny went for a ten miler while The Mc Bride gave an impromptu Johnny Cash/Elvis Presley guitar concert, ably assisted by Mc Monagle, the Hummer Along. Thunderous applause from the assembled boat decks. Our suggestion for a reduction in the mooring fee of £25, for the entertainment provided, fell on less appreciative ears. Further imprecations to the unwary-midges abound in the evening, so try and get as far out on the pontoon as possible.

Day Five Thursday 31/8.

Away mid-morning. No wind, bit of mist and rain which cleared at Ardnamurchan. Saw two otters and school of porpoises-magic. The skipper, a real card, could not resist the following "let's have eggs for lunch on Eigg". We hauled him back on board eventually. Anchored in the harbour at Eigg-very sheltered and peaceful. Funky looking glamping pods ashore, and lots of Outward Bounders about the place. The day was fine, spirits were up and we decided to spend the night on Ornsay on Skye rather than our original destination which was Mallaig, which turned out to be a fortuitous decision. Up with the main and jib, and flew the ten miles to arrive at 18.30. We could smell the cooking wafting across the harbour from our Eilean Iarmain Hotel mooring. Out with the dinghy, Danny on the engine and he had to make two trips, given the well nourished corpulence of his ship mates.

The hotel, a beautiful building, with magnificent wood panelling, was full and rightly so. Excellent service, and well trained staff who could spot hungry sailors at ten cables. The venison casserole was superb. Moonlit night-peaceful anchorage, well fed and watered-as good as it gets.

Day 6 Friday 1/9/17

John, a daily dipper, took advantage of the beautiful morning to immerse his even more well-nourished corpus in the calm waters of Ornsay on Skye Harbour. Please note there is another Oronsay down south in the Colonsay region. Departed, reluctantly, at 10.40 (things looking up). Through the Kyles of Lochash and on up to Lough Carron, our northern most point of the trip. Back to the free pontonn at the Kyles for lunch at Hector's Bothy which was excellent. Donal made the purchase of the trip, inspired by John, of a travel electric kettle 600 w. A well travelled wag, many years previous in Kinsale, had opined that the two essentials on a cruising boat were an electric kettle and a toaster. We anxiously await, on tenterhooks, the purchase of the toaster, budgetary constraints notwithstanding.

The weather forecast was not good so we turned for home, first stop Mallaig. The ride down through The Narrows was sedate compared to previous trips—we hit it just before slack water at a very leisurely 6.5 knots. Arrived in Mallaig, a very sheltered harbour at 18.50. James, the harbour master very helpful. Great new facilities. There is a very good pizza restaurant run by a young Italian right on the harbour, beside the shower block. Huge selection of books from the local bookstore, which Danny unearthed. In the same building as the bookstore is a local cafe which is packed with locals and tourists. Great fare and very reasonable.

Day Seven Saturday 2/9/17.

Weather foul so Donal and John took train from Mallaig to Fort William, with the sole intention of coming back on The Jacobite Steam train, The Lancashire Fusilier. Said to be one of the most beautiful train journeys in the world and we could not disagree. A great experience, crossing the "Harry Potter" viaduct at Inchcarron. For music and craic along with great grub and staff, try The Cluachainn Inn. It's rival, The Steam Inn across the road stops serving at 8.30. Beware. Howling gale outside the harbour—very glad to be tucked up.

Day Eight. Sunday 3/9/17

Day of Rest—still blowing a hooley outside. Galway won the Hurling Final. Danny spotted a very unusual small boat with a pronounced curved prow, on our walk around the Harbour area.

Day Nine Monday 4/9/17.

Away at 8.15 am. Heavy rain and wind south westerly 20 knots. Sense of urgency about getting back is starting to creep in. Back to Tobermory for fuel and vittles and then on to Lough Aline where they have put in new pontoons. Lovely job. There is a poem about those pontoons by Alexander Mc Call Smith engraved at the entrance to the club house. It catches the spirit of yachtsmen very nicely. Have asked the harbour master to send on a copy which hopefully I will have before publication date on the website. Dined aboard. Suspect the skipper is hiding his light under a bushel as far as culinary skill is concerned—a great talent lies dormant.

Day Ten Tuesday 5/9/17

Departure 8.35. Raining Visibility 100 meters. Wind got up later s/w 15-20 knots. Pit stop for lunch at Barnacarry Bay and to wait for the tide. Great shelter from the south west in the bay. We put the dinghy away and girded our loins for the slalom ride through Cuan Sound to the Sound of Luing and on to Ardfern. Hairy, with a tricky lee shore and a cold wind later in the evening. Shades of Autumn. Arrived at 19.30 to a very quiet Ardfern. Glad to get our heads down for an early start. Forecast for the coming few days was not good and we needed to press on if we were not to be caught out.

Day Eleven. Wedns 6/9/17

Depart Ardfern 6.00 am. Ye Gods, the shock to the system of being about at that ungodly hour.... Poor visibility. Raining. On jib and engine and tide with us all the way to Port Ellen for yet again another excellent lunch in the Sea Salt at 1.p.m Great comfort in having three crew who can spell each other on the wheel, then dry out and have an hour's nap. Danny opined there had been a lot of sleeping on this boat-who could argue ?

2.30 pm. After a bit of will we, wont we, we made the call to go for Ballycastle before the weather closed in. All kinds of nasties making their way in from the Atlantic in the coming days. A slightly lumpy crossing brought us to Rathlin Sound at 18.00 hrs at slack water. With equally impeccable timing we arrived in Ballycastle at 19.00 hrs in time for Morton's Chipper. Fish was great but the first cloud on the culinary horizon arrived in the shape of less than satisfactory chips. Talk about falling at the last fence.... Danny signed off at 20.00 hrs, collected by family en route to Donegal. The elder lemons retired for the night, content to be in home waters.

Day Twelve. Wedns 7/9/17

No less a luminary than Cathal (C.B.) Curley, Donal's brother in law (the best driver in Ireland according to legend and himself) arrived to drive us back to Omagh. When told of our exploits and the comparison with a Porsche 911, he demurred and said in all humility we should up our game a little and then compare it with a Bugatti Veyron. At the weigh in back home in Howth the author found himself putting up 4 lbs overweight; he blames the chips...