

Tory or not Tory – that was the question.

8th – 9th June 2013

Having recently taken delivery of Firsty, a Beneteau First 26, Club Commodore Antoin MacGabhann was rightly a little concerned that all would go well on her first major outing however, encouraged by her crew of First Mate Dr Dudik Khavia and Deck Hand Martin Mortimer, the decision was made that Firsty would venture out of the Swilly for the club's annual Tory Island Race.

Arriving at Rathmullen bright and early the crew released her from the shackles and edged out into the mill pond that was the loch. Dolphin, Porpoise and Basking Shark may well have been all around, however the mist was so thick even the bow could not be seen from the cockpit as the good doctor, leaning over the pulpit, directed the Commodore's prized possession towards the start line.

Due to the lack of visibility the start was moved to Swilly Mor, at the most northerly end of the loch, and a fine array of seven vessels gradually assembled out of the gloom as the sun burnt through the mist. Some took longer than others to arrive, one having carried out a couple of unnecessary 360^o manoeuvres due to navigational instrument difficulties in the 'pea-souper', but the race was soon underway.

Jockeying for position at the mouth of the loch the boats tacked out into the deep blue yonder, before heading west on the long leg towards the Kingdom. Picking up a strong NE breeze we hoisted the spinnaker and began making ground on our Club Fleet competitors.



All was going so well – Dudik keeps the skipper entertained on the run out to Tory.

Passing the spectacular Fanad Lighthouse, Mulroy Bay, Sheephaven Bay and Horn Head we gradually picked off the fleet as the day progressed and with the boat set up we were able to sit back and enjoy the glorious Donegal sun all the way to Tory Island.



Smiley happy people.

Arriving late afternoon in the tranquil setting of Tory Harbour we tied up and opened the first cold one of the evening, dined handsomely on an interesting dish created by the good doctor, before taking a stroll of the island and meeting Patsy Dan Rodgers– The King of Tory.



At the Captain's table.

A terrific night was had by all in An Club (probably enough said) and Firsty's merry crew returned to find her 6 feet lower from the harbour wall than when we left her. If only we'd stayed another 3 hours more (or less) in An Club we may not have had to abseil down to get on board – but that we did and were soon nicely tucked up in our berths.



An Club – the morning after.

On Sunday the crew let the captain lie in his slumber as they braved a morning dip in the North Atlantic before a healthy fry and lashings of coffee set them up for the cruise back to Fahan Marina.

All seemed well as we said our goodbyes to friends old and new and headed out of the harbour, however things were about to change.

Only ¼ mile out of the harbour, with less wind around than inside a tightly sealed vacuum flask, Firsty's diesel engine decided she wanted a rest and she was going to lie on as her Master had done earlier in the day.

Sails were hoisted in an attempt to catch whatever wind we could but with a rising tide we were gradually reversing back from whence we came. Antoin and Dudik went below to see what could be done as we bobbed about on a very flat sea. Numerous attempts to try and wake her had little effect and decision time was approaching when out of the harbour was cast a Magic Spell to come to our assistance.

Jim McGowan and his able crew kindly rigged up a tow and tugged us out of any danger and motored us for a good hour until we found some wind. A couple of attempts to restart the engine were to no avail but with the wind picking up it was felt we had a good chance of sailing back to Fahan and so we let go our chaperone and raised our sails.



Vivace passing us on her way home.

As we made steady progress, with the Donegal coast passing us to starboard, more work was being done down below and we were gaining confidence that we would get home at some point later that day. However Caicias, God of the northeast wind, took a change of heart and decided he was going to go to bed with our engine. There we were, no wind, no engine, a rising tide wanting to bring the rocky Horn Head closer to us and three sweaty top lips on board. We knew there was no danger, we could drop anchor if need be, we had maintained radio and phone contact with Magic Spell and the tide was due to turn.

We got our heads together and came up with the cunning plan of doing exactly the same to the fuel system as we had, to no avail, several times already when, for no apparent reason (or the expert skills of the Commodore), the engine decided she wanted nothing to do with said Caicias and sprang into life.

Once started, despite a couple of minor coughs, she kept running and delivered us safely back to Fahan Marina just as the natives were going to bed.

A memorable trip which will hopefully be repeated, with slightly less drama, next season - with thanks to Magic Spell et al.

Martin Mortimer

June 2013