

A KIND OF BLUE

Monday 18th May, I met Gary at 6am. We refuelled, stocked up and cast off from the pontoon just after 7am. We were on our way to Geeya, I'd looked for it on the charts and couldn't find it anywhere ! I sneakily asked the skipper where we were going to moor up, knowing he couldn't resist playing with all the electronic gadgetry and bring it up on screen. Gigha, GeeeeeeGaa, that's where we were going. Gary had impressed me with his Spanish in Alicante, now he was showing off, speaking in garlic.

The winds were South Westerly force 4 so we started off with a reef in the main. We took turns at watches and to doze down below. Anyone who knows me, will realise I don't normally go below on an offshore trip for fear of the dreaded Mal de Mer. I should have suspected something was wrong when I returned on deck to find Gary had shook the reef out.... and I hadn't heard a thing. A chesty cough got worse as the day went on and lingered long after the trip. It turned out I'd the plague! At least that's what Gary said I'd smit him with.

It was so comfortable on board that we decided to drill the boat hook and fit a mooring clip thingy that would be useful for someone with the use of only one arm, or indeed someone a bit useless with the use of two arms, like me. I'm not normally great with tools and things so I was extremely proud of drilling and fitting the whole lot together very neatly. After that we avoided the traffic separation zone and picked up a mooring (with the new thingy on the boat hook) in Ardminish bay, all in good time to heat the pot of chilli that Amy had prepared for us.

Gary offered to prepare dinner if I pumped up the dinghy. Now this is where the fun started. There were bags of plastic fittings but none to fit. It seemed like ages but eventually it did kind of resemble a dinghy. Gary tried the outboard and it kicked into life immediately. Result. ! After a hearty meal and a glass of Rioja, we decided to go ashore for a pint. The outboard wouldn't start. We tried and tried until our three arms were fecked. So rowing was the only answer. Of course the skipper couldn't row (unless we wanted to go round in circles) so yours truly took the oars. The dinghy was softish and after about three strokes one of the rowlocks snapped. I slipped the oar through one of the grab handles and ploughed on as Gary gave directions. He's good at that, giving directions.

The water had crept in over my boots, under my oilys and was tickling my inner thighs as we reached the beach. But we'd made it. Leaving everything on the beach, we marched on to the local hotel for a pint. I coughed and spluttered through our conversation with the off duty chef and we had a relaxing enjoyable evening. A large gentleman appeared behind the bar and decided what type of beer he'd have, before coming and sitting close by. He didn't engage us in conversation, which I find really strange, especially as he turned out to be the hotel owner or manager. Still we'd have a lovely sail, moored safely with our new boat hook and clip, were well fed and had a few drinks, so it was time to row back to A Kind Of Blue and retire. We polished off the remainder of the vino tinto and ate the cheese, biscuits and grapes that Linda had sent, accompanied by a glass or two of port of course.

The wind increased during the night but we slept well. The next morning we lazed about drinking coffee and dozing in the cockpit, in the sun and sheltered from the wind. After a lovely morning it was time to cast off and make for Craighouse on Jura. With two reefs in the main and the staysail, we were coping well but only making about four knots as it was blowing about force 6 on our nose. We turned back towards Gigha and off the wind Kind of Blue flew down the channel.

There always has to be a wee hiccup. Today we'd forgotten to lock the fridge door. We heard the crash and saw the debris lying on the floor. I was praying that Garry wouldn't ask me to go down and clear it up because I knew there'd be more than the contents of the fridge all over the floor! Thankfully he went below himself and reported only a broken shelf as lasting damage.

We picked up our mooring in Ardminish bay again and prepared dinner. Another yacht picked up a mooring and proceeded to inflate their dinghy, with even less success than us. They called us up on the VHF and I volunteered to row over and help. With our plug-in pump and bits and bobs we got it inflated ok. On returning to Kind of Blue, Garry said he'd tried the outboard and it fired up again! So we prepared for another trip ashore, in a dinghy that was a lot less inflated than our neighbours.

Now this is where the fun really really began. Sitting on the side of the slightly deflated dinghy, with the outboard fired up, we set off. It's kind of hard to describe what happened next, and I've no doubt the skipper would have a different view than mine. I'm also sure he got me mixed up with some guy called Richard, cos he called me Dick most of the night. Anyway, as I turned the throttle on the engine, I kind of felt myself falling backwards towards the water as the dinghy was quite soft at this stage. Of course anyone would understand (except Garry) that your natural instinct is to grasp tightly anything that will keep you from falling in. Unfortunately that meant I squeezed the throttle hard and we took off like something in a Disney cartoon. Every time I lurched back, I grasped, and we lurched forward! We did a few lovely figure of eights before we rammed into the side of Kind of Blue.

It was then that the air turned "A KIND OF BLUE"

"Are you trying to f**kin kill me, Dick" cried Garry. I was too busy clinging on to figure out who Dick was. We shot up the side of the boat and out below the pulpit, Garry's head just missing the mooring lines. "Are you trying to take the feckin head off me !!!" he roared. As we sped towards the pier at full throttle, Garry shouted "you're going the wrong way! Over towards the beach". I changed direction, and the engine died. We tried in vain but she refused to start. So it was back to the oars and eventually we reached the shore.

After dragging the dinghy up the beach, we were greeted with "are you going to the hotel, hop in I'll give you a lift". A local man, Tom Martin, a boatman, had been watching and waiting for us. What a laugh he must've had! We invited him in for a drink but he said he'd maybe call in later.

We were just finishing our first pint when we heard the owner/manager tell the barmaid to call last orders. Last orders at ten o'clock, it must be some kind of joke. No joke, last orders it was, so we ordered two wee ones and were sipping them gently when Tom Martin appeared back. We explained that we couldn't offer him a drink as the bar had closed. "Ach" he said softly "that's the way it is here at times".

Tom said he'd take us back to the beach and chatted about Derry, the Foyle and old boats until the rain eased. Before he left he gave us some fresh fish to take for our lunch next day. What a contrast in hospitality.

The engine wouldn't startagain, so I rowed back and we had a nightcap and retired reasonably early.

After another hearty breakfast on Wednesday morning we tried the outboard again, and guess what, there are three fuel settings. One for off, one for the tank on the engine, and one for an auxiliary tank. We had been trying it with it switched to auxiliary all the time! It ran like a sewing machine. I blame Garry.

We departed Ardminish and sailed through the channel leaving Gigalum and Cara to port. The sun was shining and the views of the coastline were superb. We started with the second reef in the main and the staysail and as the winds settled we ended up with the full main and genoa. It was a leisurely sail and we did our watches and rested as needed. We only saw a couple of yachts and one tall ship, all far off in the distance. We avoided a container ship and the only other thing of any note was that the boat hook got lost ! Yes that one, the one that was proof of my engineering skills, the one with the fancy hook thingy, there it was, GONE.

A porpoise appeared briefly off Portstewart, and we started the engine as we neared the Tuns. As we tied up at Foyle Marina, we looked back on a fantastic two days away. Wee jobs done and wee jobs to do, and having to leave, we were a Kind of Blue.

Ken Curry