

Kind Of Blue Sailability Trip to St Kilda 2016 - CAPTAIN'S LOG (by Ken Curry)

We left Derry on Tuesday 7th of June and motored down to Greencastle where we joined the other volunteers at the Foyle Sailability event. As usual kids and adults with all sorts of disabilities were given the chance to get on the water and enjoy the experience of being afloat. What an amazing bunch of people these Sailability volunteers are!

When the event was over and everything cleared up, it was time to wet our whistles in the Ferryport bar. We discussed the success of Foyle Sailability and looked forward to our trip to the Outer Hebrides and to raising awareness of what Sailability does. As we were to set off first thing the following morning, there were emotional goodbyes, tears flowed, and it was only right that the Guinness flowed too!



Next morning, we set sail from the harbour and were given a spectacular send off by the many friends of Foyle Sailability as we motored out into a foggy day. The fog remained all day and well into the night as we settled into a watch system. The only things we saw during the morning were pots, sea birds and a seal. The fog cleared for a while about lunchtime and we fished on Heyton's turbot bank. We never saw a mackerel, never mind a turbot, and that was to be the result every time we fished. We could definitely learn from some of the crew on Dream Machine. Them Donegal men know everything sure!

We spotted two fishing boats lifting pots and then the fog descended again. It was a long afternoon and evening, with the only excitement hearing of the eventual locating of missing divers after a Mayday call. About half past midnight, the fog cleared and under a crescent moon and near daylight conditions I enjoyed my first night watch of the trip. Garry spotted minke whales just as the sun was rising. We motored on in glorious weather, wishing for some wind, but enjoying the beautiful conditions, happy with our lot.

Lochmaddy, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, Scotland Beautiful.

Now after such a long sail up to Lochmaddy, and with the prospect of a possible 24 hour+ race around St Kilda for Dream Machine, you'd expect we would have immediately rested upof course we didn't!

The sun was shining, there was a pre-race meeting.....and pints to be drunk. We did manage to refuel the boat too with the help of Johnny (red beard) MacDonald, so we were ready to go on Kind of Blue.

We left Lochmaddy at 05.45 and made our way to the Sound of Harris for the race start. Those of us who weren't racing were given instructions to contact the warden on St Kilda and to drop anchor in Village Bay. There was very little wind and we didn't envy those taking part in the race. On our way to St Kilda we spotted minke whales, puffins, fulmars and gannets.

On arrival in the bay at 19.00 hours Garry motored close to the beach where we dropped anchor. It's hard to describe this place, beautiful, stunning and yet kind of eerie, like the edge of the world. We went ashore in the dinghy and explored. The ruins of the dwellings and cleiteans (stone storage stacks for food and fuel) gave us an idea of how hard life must have been there. We saw Soay sheep, a type of primitive breed which dates back to the Bronze age. We met some of the volunteers with the National Trust who were out repairing buildings etc and they gave us quite a bit of information about the island. We got photos taken with our Foyle Sailability and Malin Waters flags as proof that we did set foot on this magnificent place. Our only regret is we didn't try to get in to the Puff Inn, the bar in the military base, but we were ready for a meal, a glass of wine and early to bed.



We were woken at 4.00am by the anchor alarm! With no big drama, we re-fuelled and motored out of Village Bay. Apart from a strange tidal change at about 5.30am and spotting a couple of Minke whales again, the trip back was straightforward enough. We did get the sails up but it was only for a short period and motored through the Sound of Harris again, tying up to a visitor's mooring in Lochmaddy at 17.00 hrs.

George McCormick and the crew of Dream Machine did us all proud, just missing out on a podium place. What an achievement in very light wind conditions. The presentation of awards that evening saw us all return laden with lots of lovely home produced goodies, and St Kilda challenge medals. Skipper Garry was interviewed for some television programme and also became great pals with Her Majesty's cousin, Fergus Granville. I nearly succeeded in not writing GGGGGGGGGranville, oops!

It turned out he only owned the island. We all met Ian MacRory who had taken over Salar smoked salmon fishery. His samples were delicious and he generously provided us with more for the rest of the trip. Dream Machine's skipper and crew were absolutely shattered having sailed with little or no sleep for so long, so we were impressed that they stayed up and celebrated until the wee hours.



It appears that North and South Uist are a bit like east and west Belfast, and as we entered the hotel bar we were greeted with all kinds of Glasgow Rangers photographs on the walls. It mattered not a jot, the Donegal and Derry/Londonderry crews made themselves at home, and even gave the locals a rendition of The Galway Shawl before retiring to the boats. All except Mickey, Dream Machines navigator. Mickey decided to make use of the hotel facilities and promptly booked in. When the wee lassie asked his name, he announced in a full voice " Michael McCormick Junior The Third". It impressed the locals.... and a few of us too, as we just fondly knew him as Mickey no legs up to that! It's a kind of unwritten rule on a Sailability trip, every boat should have a

disabled person on board. Dream Machine had Mickey as their extremely good navigator, while we're still trying to work out which of the Kind of Blue crew was the biggest handicap! I rowed us back to Kind of Blue, watched anxiously by the Dream Machine Team.

Sunday morning, nursing a few sore heads, we decided to breakfast in the hotel. All was going well, it was 11.45 or so, but we were told we could get fed alright. Then we nearly created an international incident..... we asked for three pints! What a commotion ensued. The manageress said that if the police came they could check the till rolls for time and everyone on the island would be incarcerated or sent to live on St Kilda to harvest bird's eggs or something like that! The skipper remained calm and simply laid a note on the counter and said " sure you can ring that in whenever you like", and it defused the situation slightly. He's well trained at defusing international incidents is the skipper. Just ask the locals in the Squealing Pig.

We left at 16.00 and motor sailed to Lochboisdale on Southern Uist tying up about 20.30. The two crews met on Kind of Blue and a great night's craic was had by all. Somebody must have fallen over and spilled a lot of stuff because when we woke in the morning, there was no beer left, no wine, no Cuarenta y Tres and no port!

The next day we headed for Tobermory. It was another glorious day. With the weather being so good, we were able to relax and chatted about everything under the sun. We talked about boats, bikes, motorbikes, politics, weather, how good it was to have no mobile signals, all sorts of manly conversations. When we got on to health and well-being, well there was no stopping us. Garry told us how some lady had asked him what his moisturising regime was. He admitted to using Oil of Ulay or something Marie had bought for him in Boots, I said I used Oil of Something out of a wee bottle I'd nicked from the last hotel I stayed in!

We came across a pod of common dolphins, the like of which I have never seen before. There must have been nearly 50 of them. At first, quite a bit away from us, they passed ahead leaping out of the water. Then the pod seemed to split in two, with half of them coming straight at us like torpedoes. They sped along side of us and swam in the bow wave. It was a sight the three of us will never forget.

When we tied up in picturesque Tobermory, we met Jim Salmon on board Vivace. The crews of Dream Machine and Kind of Blue ate a hearty meal in Macgochans which is situated close to the marina and afterwards Garry took Conor and I for a pint or two in the cosy Mishnish bar.

As you can imagine in preparation for such a long trip, the crew trains hard before setting off. I take you back to an early June morning, the three of us, Garry, Conor and myself, packed tightly in the heads, staring into the bowl. " That's definitely the captain's log " I said. Well I kind of muffled it because I had my fleece pulled up over my nose. " This is important training! " Garry announced sternly " we had issues during the round Ireland trip last year and we're not going to make the same mistakes this year " Connor didn't say anything, which was understandable as he'd passed out. I'll not go into detail about how we overcame these problems, but I'll let you read Marie's poem, and you can work it out for yourself. (the old puns are the best).

CAPTAIN'S LOG

MESSAGE TO THE CREW ...
NO PAPER DOWN THE LOO
AND IF YOU DO A POO
THEN MACERATE IT TOO !

THE BIN IS FOR THE PAPER
THE STICK, THE MACERATOR,
SO IF YOU BLOCK THE LOO,
THE CLEANING'S DOWN TO YOU !!

I blame Anne Marie Kenny..... it was she who told us how they had dealt with the same problems on the Clipper race. Of course, it was either the stick, or "bucket and chuck it". We of course chucked the stick and the paper (all bio-degradable) over the side. I couldn't stop thinking every time I did this on an old Billy Connolly yarn from years ago about jobbies and fishies, but that's for another day.

Anyway, back to our trip. We left Tobermory on a beautiful afternoon and made our way to Craighouse, Jura. The weather was fine and we enjoyed a wee cup of tea and a Tunnock cake on the way. Garry had calculated the tides well and as we passed abeam of the famous Gulf of Corryvreckan, we noted how calm it looked, nothing like the walls of sea and whirlpools we expected. We were so lucky with the weather, but would have liked a bit more wind. As we passed Barnhill on Jura, George Orwell's house where he wrote "1984", we had another cuppa. That's when we realised we were all out of Drambuie for the skipper's coffee. When we reached Craighouse we tied up as quickly as we could to a mooring and just made the hotel bar for last orders at midnight.

On 15th June we left the mooring on Craighouse after paying the fees at the local coffee shop. It turns out we'd tied up to the local ferry mooring and we're still not sure whether the guy who runs it was really angry or just taking the piss when he scolded us. We didn't want to annoy him any more as he was the size of the proverbial outhouse. We motored inside the Ardmoy islands watched by dozens of wary seals.

Our aim was to spend the night in Portrush, but as luck would have it, the wind finally picked up. There was a small craft warning (north winds force 7) at 17.30, so we changed course and headed for the Foyle. We flew into the estuary mouth under sail and prepared to motor upstream. Luckily we still had canvas up as the engine cooling water air locked. The skipper decided to anchor up until we sorted it out, and so, under sail we found a safe anchorage, much to the amusement of the occupants of a nearby house. I wonder what they thought we were at as they watched us bob about with the smell of my cooking wafting up to their sun-room windows. Our last hearty meal of the trip finished, and the water cooling the engine as it should, we lifted the hook and headed for home, passing two tugs on the way.

Finally tied up at Foyle Marina at 03.10 hours, we were too tired to reflect and headed for our respective homes.

Thank you, Garry, Connor and Kind of Blue for an amazing trip, and a huge thanks to George McCormick and the fabulous crew of Dream Machine. May we all live to do it again, and again, and again!

