

WELL STEWED IN THE MOUNTAIN MIST

When Peter bought Mountain Mist, grown men (and women) envied him. Chins dripped saliva as we discussed the good points (of which there are many) and the fun to be had owning and skippering a Trapper 300, and the few bad points (we'll not go into the tearing up of £20 notes in a cold shower !)

Common sense goes out the window. I really should have worked, but sailing dulls your sense of reality. The only important thing is getting out on the water. I got the call and gathered my gear up like a ten year old going on scout camp. We were heading to Derry, or Derry/Londonderry, or Derry/Londonderry/Doire !!! Somewhere that sounded very exotic anyway, and would test the boat, skipper and motley crew. "Kieran said we'd be time enough leaving to one o'clock" said Peter. "I'll be there" said I.

Next morning, about 11 am, Peter rang..... "We're going at 12 now !" "SHIT!" said I. "Gary reckons we'd need to get away to catch the tidal gate" I'm sure that's what he said, but in hind sight, it may have been "Gary says it could be too effin late"

I raced down the Strand Road in (Derry/Londonderry/Doire), stopped off at the Centra to buy a stew because I was ravenous, bought two stews(forward thinking) and a Picnic bar. Ate said Picnic bar on the final leg to Fahan. Peter and the two Gary's, were ready to cast off. Desperado Gary, you know the one, the Gary that can tie a bowline twice as good and twice as quickly as I can, with one bloody hand, whispered as I climbed aboard "I don't think we're gonna make it to Malin in time"

Peter was smiling like a basket of Bridie's chips, the weather was ok, the two Gary's busied themselves with lines and fenders and I ate a few mouthfuls of lukewarm breakfast stew. Reliable and economical, the engine ran like a sewing machine. Come to think of it, a sewing machine would probably have created about the same forward force. We crawled up the lough, with no great difficulty, no great speed and just the odd whisper from the now Desperate Gary, "we're never gonna make it"

As we passed Dunree, it became clear that the skipper wasn't going to be generous with the rations, and there were murmurs of mutiny, until we realised that there was enough beer to keep us going until we reached

Derry/Londonderry/Doire. Gary, the really Desperate Gary, suddenly realised that he was the only one concerned about making the tidal gate. It dawned on him that he was in fact the only one on board who really knew what he was doing, apart from picking the correct time to leave ! Peter had taught Gary(the quiet one) and I how to smile like baskets of chips too, so were totally oblivious to the consequences of not getting around Malin Head on time. It was time for action. Sails were trimmed and tweaked and soon we were soaring along at two and a half knots ! As we left the lough I considered hiding the stew. A mouthful every now and then as I passed on the way to the heads would keep me going for a long time. But the thought disappeared as we reached the tidal gate, and realised we were still making speed over the ground. (Someone must have left the gate open) There was positivity in the air, and Gary(the not so Desperate one now) said " I knew all along we'd make it"

And so we trundled around Malin Head, happy in the knowledge that the Ferryport served beautiful Guinness and the wee chippie did great fish and chips. Cans of Carlsberg are good, but nothing tastes better than a pint of Guinness after a day sailing.

Everyone likes to be a record breaker, and we knew we had this one in the bag as the darkness descended. The longest time to sail from Fahan to Derry/Lo.... No scrap that..... From Fahan to Greencastle ! As we were guided in to the Foyle by the light from Shrove lighthouse, we were proud, and we were ready to celebrate this marvellous achievement when we tied up in Greencastle. Those of you who have experienced long distance sailing will know what it's like to approach a long awaited port. We could smell the soil, the grass, the fish and chips.....mmmmmmmm and the Guinness. As we approached we all strained for a glimpse of the Ferryport.....and there it was, the welcoming lights beckoning us in. All we had to do was tie up and stroll to the pub. We passed the harbour entrance and something strange happened..... Somebody switched the lights offnot on the boat, but the whole of Greencastle ! It was so dark we missed the visitors pontoon and instead tied up alongside the boats in the inner harbour. Scrambling from boat to boat we dashed towards the pub, but it too was in darkness. No pub, no chippie Nothing ! After a moments quiet reflection and silent prayer It was back to the boat, open more Carlsberg, and sure all we had to do was stick the stews in a

pot and heat them for supper, climb in to our sleeping bags and be totally refreshed for the morning trip to ... the Maiden City.

"I threw the pots and cutlery and all in the attic" said the skipper "sure I can't cook anyway, and I chucked the gas cylinder out too to make the boat go faster"

"Thank god ye did or it would have taken us ages ! " said Gary (the quiet one)

We found a one ring camping stove. The stews were heated, in their tin foil dishes, slowly, one by one, with only a slight smell of burning, and we shared them.... and we also shared the one plastic spoon I had got (was it that morning or the morning before) in the Strand Road Centra.

Of course when we left Fahan it was to be a quick jaunt round the coast, so not one sleeping bag was on board. We all huddled together for heat in the main cabin bed, all except Gary (Desperado f* you mate I'm alright) who grabbed the spinnaker, wrapped himself up in the fore cabin and snored contentedly until morning.**

We breakfasted on fresh coffee and sandwiches at the local shop, impressing the locals with our tales of sailing the wild Atlantic Ocean. We pretended not to notice the HUGE visitors pontoon as we left and made our final passage to Derry ! We were met like long lost sons at the quay, and Peter still smiled like a basket of chips. What a great trip and a great learning experience. I now know to NEVER go anywhere without food, cutlery, a two ring cooker/oven and a full cylinder of gas !

(No skippers or egos were damaged in the making of this trip)

Ken Curry