

# *Boomerang's 2008 Log*

*Norway*  
*The Shetland Islands*  
*St Kilda*

*April & May*  
*South Queensferry to Bergen*  
*Hardanger Fjord, Bomlo & Stord*  
*Selbjorns fjord to Lerwick*  
*Circumnavigation of The Shetland Islands*  
*Fair Isle*  
*The Orkney Islands*  
*Kirkwall to the River Tay*  
*Return to South Queensferry*



## The Preparations

When my diagnosis of MND was confirmed in July 2007 I decided it was time to retire and start off-shore sailing. My first idea was to join the 2008 ARC and for this I needed to find a sailing companion, somebody either unemployed or able to throw off the shackles of labour for a few months. I posted adverts in local yacht clubs and subscribed to the *crew-seekers* website but without luck until my neighbour at Port Edgar Marina put me in touch with Mike Bowley. We first met in September and I discovered he was an experienced yachtsman, out of work, and although not available to sail south to the Canaries that October, we agreed to cross to Norway the following April. It was a long term ambition of mine to sail to Bergen and somehow I preferred this to sitting in the Caribbean sun.

Boomerang is a 35ft Hustler with fin keel and skeep, built in 1971. When I bought her in 2004 I kept her on west coast to sail and make her seaworthy. This meant replacing the sea-cocks and hoses, improving the cockpit drainage, up-grading the primary fuel system and replacing switch panels and most of the wiring. To satisfy the insurers, my gas stove supply also needed modernised but as this would also involve fitting sensors and alarms, I ditched the gas stove overboard and bought a spirit *Origa* twin burner top stove instead. I wanted an auto-helm for long passage-making and as wind vane steering seemed too tricky to fit, I opted instead for an electric autopilot and a *Duogen* wind/towed generator combination.



### *The crew*

In February 2008 Mike confirmed he was on for the crossing and so I asked Alan Gordon if he could get time off work and join us. We'd spoken about sailing to Norway a few years before and I knew he'd be keen. Alan and I are members of Wormit Boating Club and we'd sailed together a few times including a sail from Dunstaffnage to Port Edgar. Three is a good number of people for an extended cruise and I knew Alan would be the perfect companion for Mike and me!

### *Charts*

I don't see the point in chart plotters if you have to also carry paper charts and besides, the Hustler was designed by Don Pye, the navigator of Holman & Pye, and has a large chart table. We took the three North Sea Admiralty Charts (Northern, Central & Southern) and *Batsportkart* small craft 1:50,000 series covering cruising ground around Bergen. These charts are expensive but high quality and fit unfolded on the chart table. They have lots of detail and a magnifying glass is handy for reading them. Judy Lomax's *Norway Pilot Guide* (*Imray* 1<sup>st</sup> edition) completes the set. It covers the entire coast of Norway but we found it very useful and accurate.

We used VHF communications and carried an EPIRB, a *Navtex* receiver and an ocean life-raft. Jerry cans were useful for getting fuel in remote areas of the fjords.

For weather forecasting prior to departure, I used [northseaweather.co.uk](http://northseaweather.co.uk), a service provided for the oil industry. The 4 day forecast was 100% correct.

### *Alan enjoying swinging in the rigging*



## *Port Edgar to Bergen*

At 1900 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008 we motored out into the Forth at the start of the ebb. The forecast was for F4/5 SE but within a few hours we were head to wind and the river was quite rough. The 4 day forecast predicted light winds on day 2, freshening on day 3 and remaining favourable for our run into Bergen.

A watch pattern was agreed that worked well for the whole journey; I kept watch 2000-2400, Alan 0400 to 0800 and Mike, volunteered for 0000 to 0400 because he doesn't sleep well at night but can easily make up for it in the daytime. He's quite an asset for night passages!

By sunset we'd travelled 12 miles but motoring into the open Firth the swell and headwind was making the boat roll about very uncomfortably. I'd planned to fit lee cloths but forgot among all the other preparations. It was to prove a stupid error for although Boomerang has two snug pilot berths it's very hard climbing in and out of them at sea. The first night was quite miserable due to the engine noise and relentless boat motion. Each of us developed various shades of seasickness and by day-break I was disappointed to see the Fife Coast still clearly visible. It's known that round-world yachtsmen are often sick for their first 48hrs at sea so I didn't feel too bad about it. At 0500 next morning we were relieved to stop the engine and start sailing NE in fine weather, wind F3/4 and mostly southerly.

***22hrs underway***

***35m east of Aberdeen, Log 100nm***

We still couldn't spend much time at the galley and only managed to eat cuppa soup and the excellent cakes made for us by Alan's wife Anne and daughter Lynne. It's no exaggeration to say those cakes sustained us for the first 36 hours. We'd become significantly dehydrated and I resolved in future to take lots of high energy drinks on any trips to sea.

***36hrs underway***

***East of Kittiwake Oilfield, log 152nm.***

As we gathered in the cockpit for breakfast on the second morning, the wind had dropped, and a mist developed over the sea. Oil rigs were just visible on the horizon and we started the engine to maintain our progress. Bobbing around doing 2 knots in the

middle of the North Sea seems a bit futile unless you're involved in a race perhaps, and anyway, we were hoping to reach Norway with time to spare for exploring some fjords.

The visibility deteriorated as we motored between Britannia Gas Field and Chestnut Oil Field then at about 2030, the engine's low oil pressure warning started to beep. I decided to stop the engine and wait until daylight to check this. We'd taken a bit of a dog leg to avoid the rigs and so now we were drifting northwards in the dark as the fog closed in all around us. *(Next morning we discovered the oil filter had worked loose.)*

The sea had barely a ripple at midnight when a fishing boat appeared out of the gloom with her deck lights blazing. It was so close and advancing on us that we were forced to illuminate our main sail with a 12v flashlight. This seemed to do the trick as it turned away quickly and vanished again. I guess it must have seen us but a quick call from us on Channel 16 could have been useful. A few hours later the wind picked-up and we were sailing again, and would continue under sail alone until reaching the Norwegian coast.

## ***58hrs underway 130nm NE of Rattray Head 155nm to Bergen***

On our third day at sea the forecast proved accurate as the wind increased to 25kn SW with 30kn gusts. The sailing conditions were excellent as we broad-reached in organised seas with full sail and making 7 to 8 knots. It started raining and waves were sweeping across the decks but we kept reasonably dry behind the sprayhood. By mid- afternoon and passing Grane Oilfield to port, all hands were feeling content except for the rising damp from inevitable water finding a way into the cabin. But thanks to the *Eberspacher* heater we dried out and kept warm and began to feel very comfortable. For the first time I began to appreciate what ocean sailing is like, once you've exchanged land legs for sea legs!



Each day of the crossing so far had been very different but this was the best one yet. Turning in for my rest at midnight, I felt very happy with Boomerang's solid dependability, tempered by a constant fear that something was sure to break! The wind continued to blow in our favour throughout the fourth night and Alan woke us at 0400 to see the Norwegian coast. Two hours later we entered Korsfjord after 83hrs at sea.



The route into Bergen is inside the protection of Sotra, by Korsfjord and Raunefjord (seen in reverse, top right of picture below).

***Bergen - yacht berthing is at Vagen Harbour (near side, middle right)***



(courtesy of Wikipedia)

Alongside Vagen harbour is **Bryggen** (Norwegian for *the Wharf*) also known as **Tyskebryggen** (*the German Wharf*) a series of Hanseatic commercial buildings lining the eastern side of the fjord coming into Bergen. Bryggen is on the UNESCO list for World Cultural Heritage sites.



*(courtesy of Wikipedia)*

*"The city of Bergen was founded in 1070. In 1360 a Kontor of the Hanseatic League was established there, and as the town developed into an important trading centre, the wharfs were improved. The administrative buildings of Bryggen housed clerks from many areas, especially Germany. The warehouses were filled with goods, particularly fish from northern Norway, and cereal from Europe. Throughout history, Bergen has experienced many fires, since, traditionally, most houses were made from wood. This was also the case for Bryggen, and as of today, around a quarter dates back to the time after 1702, when the older wharf side warehouses and administrative buildings burned down. The rest predominantly consists of younger structures, although there are some stone cellars that date back to the 15th century. Parts of Bryggen were destroyed in a fire in 1955. This area was used for the construction of Bryggen museum containing archeological remains, plus some old-style wooden houses, these being the six leftmost houses on the panoramic picture above. Controversially, a brick hotel was also raised on the premises, which is seen behind the houses." (text courtesy of Wikipedia)*

**Boomerang berthed at  
Vagen Harbour on 29  
April 2008**



It was free to berth at the harbour and it's very close to the centre of Bergen, alongside Bryggen. We'd not forgotten about customs clearance but everything seemed so relaxed (as suggested in Judy Lomax's book p. 17) and nobody approached us other than a German warning us about the local price of alcohol! In fact HM Customs ask to be informed if visiting foreign countries but I only learnt this much later.

Fresh water is available by the quay but no other facilities. We spent the day ashore at the markets, pubs and cafés. The city was hosting an international music festival and the streets were busy with many tourists.



Our passage plan only went as far as getting to Bergen so we went to the tourist office to look for ideas of how to spend our next 5 days in Norway. The choice was between cruising north as far as Fensfjord or south into Hardanger Fjord. There seemed a lot of cruising interest around Bomlo and Stord to the south of Bergen so we chose this route. This meant buying extra charts. In Norway these are usually found in good bookshops or art shops and priced the same as in UK. We also wanted to buy denatured alcohol for our onboard spirit stove. Meths is well known for burning with a nauseating smell (even with a bit of added water) and is slow to ignite with an almost invisible flame. But that's all there is available Britain. In Norway they use a pink spirit and share a concern about people quaffing the stuff so the shop assistant eyed us warily when we asked for 12 litres from the back of the store. We reassured him we had

plenty tasty alcohol aboard so wouldn't be drinking the stuff! This pink spirit worked better than meths with a less obnoxious odour and faster cooking. I'd switched to using a spirit stove as a short term fix, to satisfy my insurers. Replacing 38 year old gas piping and installing gas detectors and an alarm seemed unnecessarily costly, provided I could get by with a simple spirit stove. Each of us found the cooking and boiling up equally good as using gas but without any risk of explosion. I recommend it.

### Cruising south from Bergen



### ***Sotra-Limavag***

We retraced our inward route a short way down Raunefjord to spend the night at Limavag, a delightful narrow inlet on the east side of Sotra. Grateful to be offered a private pier, we had the chance to try some stern-on mooring.



Next morning we headed south, crossing Korsfjord into Bjornafjord. (see map on previous page) From here there's a choice of three routes to Hardangerfjord. Langenuen is the simplest, a broad main route passing from Korsfjord between Huftaroy and Reksteren and down the east side of Stord. West of this is Nyteia and Stokksund entered from Selbjornsfjord, narrower and more navigationally challenging (this was our return route) but we chose to reach Hardangerfjord by the most direct third route, Lokksund, an attractive narrow 6 mile shortcut entered from the east end of Bjornafjord, passing between the mainland and Tysnes. We passed about 25 yachts racing west along Bjornafjord heading for Stord.

### ***North entrance to Lokksund***



*The south end of Lokksund, anchored at Teroysund with Hardangerfjord behind*



By now high pressure had set-in and we were to enjoy 4 days of clear skies, sun and slight breeze. Going up Hardanger Fjord among snow capped peaks and a following breeze we poled-out the genoa and made 3-4kn under sail alone. Hardanger is a group of fjords that penetrates 70miles inland between mountains rising to 1,500m. The locals work in salmon farming, fishing, wooden boat building, forestry, fruit growing and farming. The population of the Hardanger area is around 70,000, mainly living in small settlements scattered along the water's edge. There are almost no anchorages as the water is more than 800m deep.

By late afternoon we'd motor-sailed as far as Jondal on the south shore.

*Jondal - Hardangerfjord*



A man who gave a good impression of being in charge of the pontoons waived our berthing fee as "it was too early in the season". This was obvious to us but there must be a very good case for cruising Norwegian Fjords in early May. In the town that evening we found all the shops closed, no pubs or cafes open and nobody was about except for a dog taking his drunken owner for an evening walk. But next morning the town came alive and there was a busy bustle about the place, confirming its status as a regional centre. It's not obviously a tourist resort but is well-known to Norwegians for access to glacier skiing, just 30 minutes by bus. A local called Jurgen came to see us at the pontoon and invited us round to his father-in-law's house for tea and to look at maps and photos of his home on Stord. He told us how Stord is sometimes called "Norway in miniature" as it has such a variety of landscapes: coastline, fjords, forests, agricultural land, and mountain areas. Jurgen was staying with his father-in-law to fish in the fjord and persuaded us that the scenery further up the fjord didn't change much and that we'd make better use of our time by sailing back down to cruise the archipelago (skjoergard) around Stord and Bomlo. But we'd been told that Fykkesund, a very narrow fjord branch on the other side of the fjord was worth visiting, so after buying diesel at the local Spar we crossed the fjord to Norheimsund. This is a slightly bigger town, very tidy with several tourist shops, great scenery and a wooden boat museum.

The marina was new and much larger than described in the pilot book. It has showers, toilets, laundrette and even *wifi* but none of this was available because we couldn't find anyone who knew the entry code to the facilities. Payment was by an honesty box, 100Kr (£10) a night, but I didn't feel they deserved it and nor do I think anybody was about to care!

### ***Norheimsund***



Next day we abandoned the idea of visiting Fykkesund in favour of returning to spend our time in around the Stord/Bomlo archipelago.

*In Hardangefjord-heading west*



*Leirvik harbour and Leirvik (pop. 11,342) a municipal centre at the SE corner of Stord*



We berthed overnight in the harbour and once again found very little evidence of any night-life except for groups of young men, drunk and affable and willing to chat to us in English.

Leirvik has a small library with free internet access and the chance to catch up on weather reports and emails. The main bookshop in town has a full range of local charts. Before leaving our berth we paid 100Kr (£10) for the night's berth at a quay-side ticket machine.

Refuelling on our way out of Leirvik, the pump wouldn't take UK credit cards so we were lucky to find a Statoil engineer who let us use his Norwegian card in exchange for cash. By 1400 in brilliant sunshine we left Leirvik, passed under the road bridges spanning the south entrance to Stokksund and began three days exploring the complex skjoergard in and around Bomlo and Goddo.

In good weather this area is a boaters' paradise with so many small islands ideal for anyone keen on fishing and shooting. Sailing north by Stokksund we entered Engesundsleid and followed a tortuous route into our anchorage at Teloy. The day was an exciting rock dodging experience that gave us confidence in the accuracy of our 1:50,000 charts and all the navigational marks.



*Anchorage at Teloj with Selbjornsfjord behind*



To the right of the boat is the north entrance to Nyteia and Stokksund, one of the 3 passages south to Hardangerfjord from Selbjornsfjord and by far the most interesting route, offering cruising within throwing distance of wooded islets and well-marked rocks to avoid.





Cruising around this maze of islets and offers fantastic secluded anchorages and wilderness walks. The ingenious navigational marks such as the one in the right hand picture above aid navigation and a magnifying glass is helpful for the chart work. It's good to know the exact height of your mast because low bridges and dangling power cables have quite an influence on passage planning! Fog can also be a problem as we discovered the next day.

*Plassaholmen - our 2<sup>nd</sup> last night in Norway*



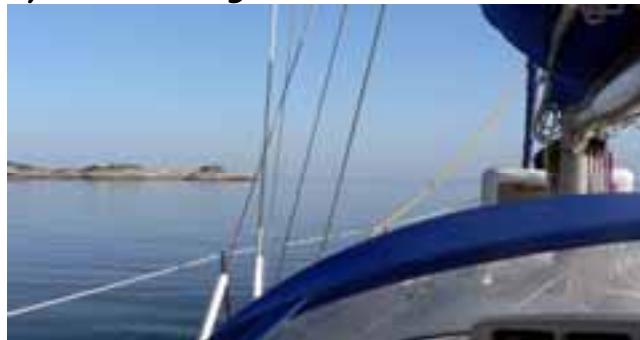
We left Plassaholmen in a dense morning mist and motored north to Brandasund for our last night before heading back to the Shetland Islands. We filled the tank with diesel collected in jerry cans and bought fresh provisions for the return trip. The storekeeper gave us an internet weather report forecasting light winds on the return journey.

### ***Brandasund***



It was surprising not to find Brandasund listed in the Pilot Guide. There are pontoons and useful store/cafe selling basic provisions, including beer and diesel, last minute postcards and ready access to the North Sea. It makes an attractive landfall but with one proviso, a strong tidal stream sets across the pontoons and you wouldn't wish to scrape your topsides like we did.

### ***8<sup>th</sup> May 0725 leaving Brandasund for the North Sea***



## *Selbjornsfjord to Lerwick*

### *200nm, 2 nights, 46 hours*

Motor-sailing west we kept just north of the 60°N across the sea to Lerwick. Motoring out into Selbjornsfjord on a misty mill pond sea, it was typical of the high pressure conditions we'd enjoyed since our landfall 5 days before. We didn't begrudge having to motor the first day of the crossing in such brilliant weather then by early evening the wind developed enough to allow sailing. I kept watch until midnight and handing over to Mike we were making 4-5kn. Next morning was overcast and the wind continued to freshen giving us good reaching for the second day and night of the crossing. The only high point of interest on any of the watches was Alan's amicable VHF conversation about collision avoidance with a Peterhead fishing boat skipper! At 0400 on the second morning out from Selbjornsfjord we rounded the sandstone cliffs of Bard Head at the southern tip of Bressay, then motor-sailed through the Sound of Bressay into Lerwick Harbour.

*Midday sun sighting on day one of the crossing*



*Bard Head*



### ***Lerwick - Victoria Harbour***



The marina is to the north of the town and a bit of a walk but a summer pontoon installed in Victoria Harbour is right by the town centre. We enjoyed a cooked breakfast ashore then met the Harbour Master who apologetically asked us to complete a customs form! He was very helpful and gave us a visitor pack and a key to Lerwick Sailing Club for free use of the toilets, showers, laundry facilities and bar.

We were made very welcome at the club and enjoyed chatting over a beer with local sailors about places to sail around the islands. They invited us to their club dance that night but we were far too knackered and looking forward to a full night in bed. Besides, Alan had to return home for work and managed to book on the 1700 ferry sailing to Aberdeen that evening. Mike and I turned in early.

## ***Circumnavigation of the Shetland Islands North to Balta Sound via The Out Skerries Muckle Flugga and Outstack Via the West Coast to Fair Isle***

***Crew: Ken Jones and Mike Bowley***

### ***Lerwick to Balta Sound via The Out Skerries***

Leaving Lerwick on 13<sup>th</sup> May the weather improved once more, to another beautiful day. We motor-sailed north east to the small cluster of outlying islands, collectively called the Out Skerries - Housay, Bruray and Granay. Those islands have a rich maritime history, mostly because of catastrophic wrecks. *"With the outbreak of the second Anglo-Dutch war in 1664 Dutch East-Indiamen, being merchant ships, avoided the English Channel and preferred to take the longer route round the north of Scotland. Ship wrecks brought the islanders occasional and limited prosperity."*

We motored into South Mouth between Housay and Bruray to have a look at the anchorage then in a freshening breeze, sailed north to Balta Sound for a night at anchor.

### ***Towards The Out Skerries and Baltasound***



### ***Baltasound- Unst***

Baltasound is the largest settlement on the island of Unst and the furthest north inhabited island in Britain. Picture is of Britain's most northerly post office.





Baltasound was formerly the second most important herring port in Shetland, in 1902 its catch exceeded that of the Shetland capital Lerwick. The herring trade declined rapidly after 1905. Valhalla Brewery opened at Baltasound in December 1997.

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1917, the WW1 British E Class Submarine E49 was heading out of Balta Sound on patrol when it struck a naval mine laid by German U-boat UC-76. It sunk in the channel between the islands of Huney and Balta with the loss of the entire crew. The site of the wreck is a war grave.

We'd entered Balta Sound by the South Channel and anchored next to the pier. Next morning it was squally and leaving by the narrow, shallow North Channel, the sea was very rough. It funnels at first in about 8m water between a reef to starboard, extending from the Balta shore and rocks lying off Unst to port. The depth increases on exiting the channel and it was good to enter open water and continue sailing north along the east coast of Unst.



### ***12/13<sup>th</sup> May - Non-stop sail from Balta Sound via Muckle Flugga to Fair Isle – 160nm in 28hrs***

After leaving Balta Sound the sea state settled as we sailed past the three large bays at the top of Unst - Harold's Wick, Nor Wick and Wick of Skaw. Saxa Vord is prominent from the north, 284m with an MOD radar station atop. This was a major part of Unst's economy until it was scaled down in 2001.

Muckle Flugga Lighthouse was engineered by Thomas & David Stevenson and the permanent light appeared in 1858. It sits on a jagged outcrop of Skerries a mile north of Unst and is the most northerly in Britain. It was automated in 1995. Out Stack is an outcrop of rock 0.4nm north of Muckle Flugga, the furthest outpost of the British Isles and it was here that Lady Franklin in 1849 landed to pray for her husband when he failed to return from his North West Passage Expedition.

*Muckle Flugga Lighthouse and Saxa Vord behind & right*



On our crossings to and from Norway we'd managed well with our respective watches but now with just two of us, Mike's preference for the night watch, and my hatred of it, meant that together we could sail comfortably non-stop. Mike would sleep 0600 - 1200 and 2200 - 0000 so we spent about 5 hours together each day. We rounded the top of the British Isles in improving weather and reaching in light winds we turned south to follow the coastline past Yell Sound, St Magnus Bay, Esha Ness Lighthouse then on towards Papa Stour and the Ve Skerries.





*Foula stands out on the horizon*



At midnight we were level with Foula and sailing against the tide, so by 0430 we'd only made 12nm before tide and wind turned favourable again. By 0600 we were 24nm north of Fair Isle and passing Sumburgh Head 20nm to port.

### *Fair Isle North Lighthouse*

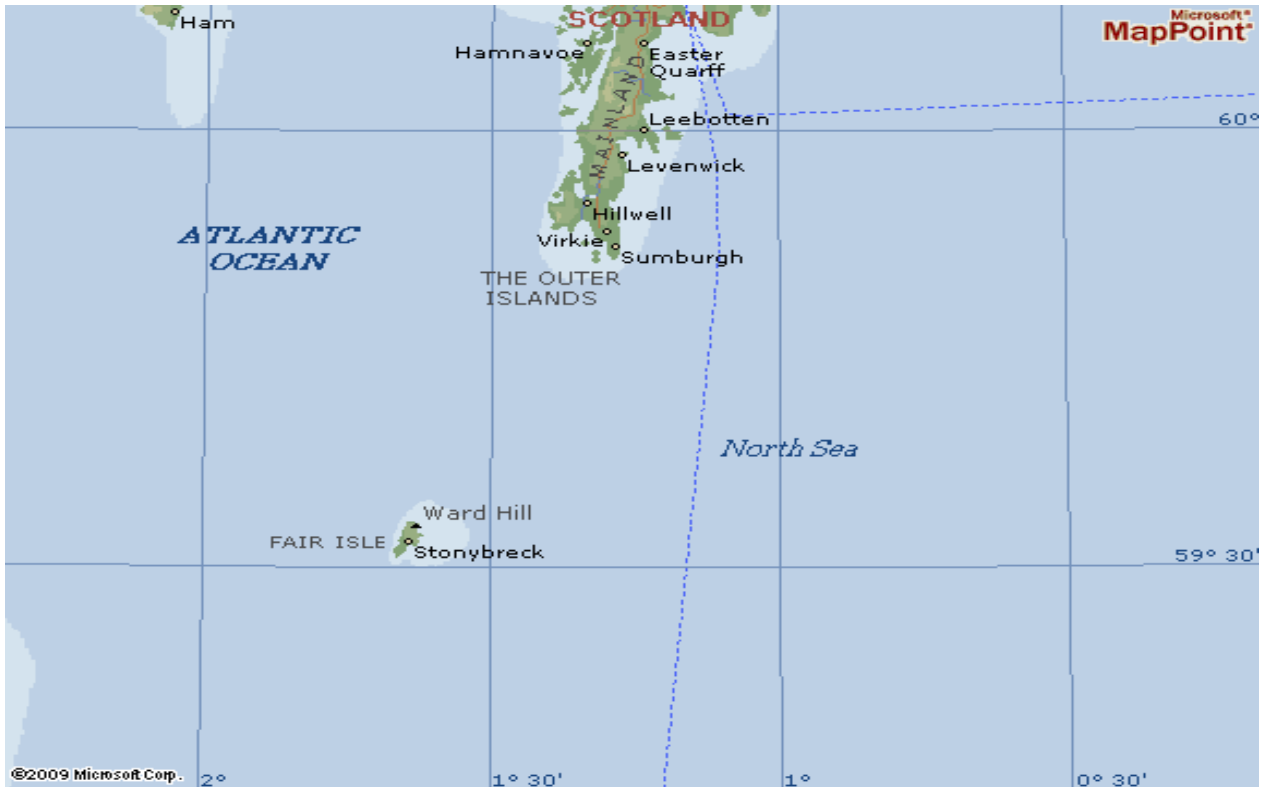


The wind had suddenly picked-up to F5/6 northerly on our approach to Fair Isle and it became quite rough. We decided to drop the mainsail and sail in the harbour under genoa alone but because we were being tossed around so much it was hard keeping head to wind. A sail batten then caught in the lazy jacks, jamming the upper wire around the port spreader. Mike climbed to the spreader to free it but gave up as there was a good chance of him being pitched overboard. So we dropped the main as far as it would go and lined up for the approach to North Haven on the east of the island. Rocks guard both sides of the entrance and further in the channel narrows between a low breakwater to port and cliffs to starboard. A heavy swell was surging through the channel but the mainsail had to be freed so we were keen to go in.

Lining up the transit from the end of the breakwater with Sheep Rock beyond, we turned on the engine and rode the swell through the narrow channel and into the safety and calm of the harbour. We tied up between the Mail Boat and one other yacht.

### *North Haven - Fair Isle*





## *Fair Isle*

Fair Isle is 24 miles south-west of Sumburgh Head. It was acquired by the NTS from the ornithologist Mr John Waterston in 1954 when the population was about 50. Previously, despite the ravages of smallpox then emigration to Nova Scotia, in 1891 there were still as many as 223 people living on the island. The NTS improved amenities and encouraged repopulation and today about 70 people are living there. A bird observatory and hostel near to North Haven Harbour provides meals and showers. Over 345 species of bird have been recorded on the island, more than anywhere else in Britain. For those interested in flora, over 240 species of flowering plant have been recorded. The islanders are served by a passenger ferry and airstrip. The locals work for the Nature Reserve, community services and also crafting, supported by fishing and knitting the famous Fair Isle jerseys. We'd hoped to buy some traditional knitwear but after walking 2 miles to the main settlement at Stoneybreck, we only met a dog.

Back aboard Boomerang we saw a familiar boat rounding the breakwater. It was Zophiel from Port Edgar - a Vancouver 27 sailed single-handed by Martin Edge. He was planning on a passage to Bergen and tied up next to Island mail boat. Shortly after a 30ft catamaran came and rafted alongside with 4 athletic-looking young men onboard and a middle aged skipper. They'd set out to sail from Lerwick to Bergen but turned back due to head winds and steep seas. It was becoming crowded so Mike and I decided to cast off at 1800 and sail overnight to Kirkwall, 56 miles to the south of Fair Isle.

## ***13<sup>th</sup> May - 56nm night sail from Fair Isle to Kirkwall***

It was another glorious summer evening sail as we rounded Fair Isle and ran with 5Kn NE winds towards the Orkney Islands. We were in no hurry to get home and relaxed under sail in the favourable May weather. My watch saw the sun set then the early morning sun as we rounded Auskerry Lighthouse and entered Stronsay Firth. There were many pots and working fishing boats to dodge on the way in and Mike joined me on deck as we passed through "The String" and entered Kirkwall Bay.

***The Kirkwall marina entrance is left of the large ice-house***



We berthed at the modern marina at 1300 on 14<sup>th</sup> May. After spending the afternoon and evening exploring Kirkwall, we slept well and early next morning took a bus to Skara Brae, then a taxi to Stromness and a bus back to Kirkwall. Back at the marina our Swedish friends from Fair Isle manoeuvred into a berth next to us. They'd been given a bottle of Islay Malt by someone on their travels and not recognising it as normal whisky, they gladly exchanged it for a bottle of our White & McKay. This led to a pleasant evening aboard their very plush yacht, enjoying our whiskies and extolling the joy of cruising!



***15/16/17th May***

***260 nm passage from Kirkwall to Wormit***

Leaving Kirkwall once more by Stronsay Firth, at 1730 on 15<sup>th</sup> May, A Minkie Whale joined us for a short time off Copinsay Island.



We sailed overnight in a good breeze across the Moray Firth. The wind was mostly northerly so we kept quite close to the coast and by dusk on the 2<sup>nd</sup> night we'd cleared Aberdeen VTS and continued sailing in WNW F5, passing Arbroath at 0630, escorted by a school of dolphins.

By complete chance we were approaching the Tay on the WBC Open Day so we turned in to the estuary, arriving to anchor at 1200, west of the Woodhaven slipway. We got a run ashore in the club rescue boat. This was Boomerang's first visit to the River Tay and Wormit Boating Club. The Club was my inspiration and encouragement to start sailing and I owe several members my gratitude for their help. The Open Day was going very well and Mike and I relaxed and dined on soup, cakes and tea from the cheery galley crew. At 1600 John Karan took us out to Boomerang in the rescue boat and Alan came aboard for the last time to collect the rest of his gear.



### ***17/18<sup>th</sup> May - WBC to Port Edgar***

Mike manhandled the anchor then we set off motoring into wind. Down river passing Tayport it was getting very rough with wind against tide and in short steep waves we headed past the Middle Buoys into deep water and turned into S Andrew's Bay.

The coastal scenery between the Tay and Forth is a bit dull but it's a treat to night sail into Port Edgar, much more entertaining than in the daylight. The pilotage becomes tricky owing to numerous channel lights, ships at anchor and underway and oil installations, but all the difficulties are over once the illuminated Forth Bridges lie dead ahead. It must be one of the most impressive entrances to any harbour.

We berthed at Port Edgar 0400 and slept until woken by the morning rush hour on the bridge and the prospect of our first night in a bed ashore in 23 days.

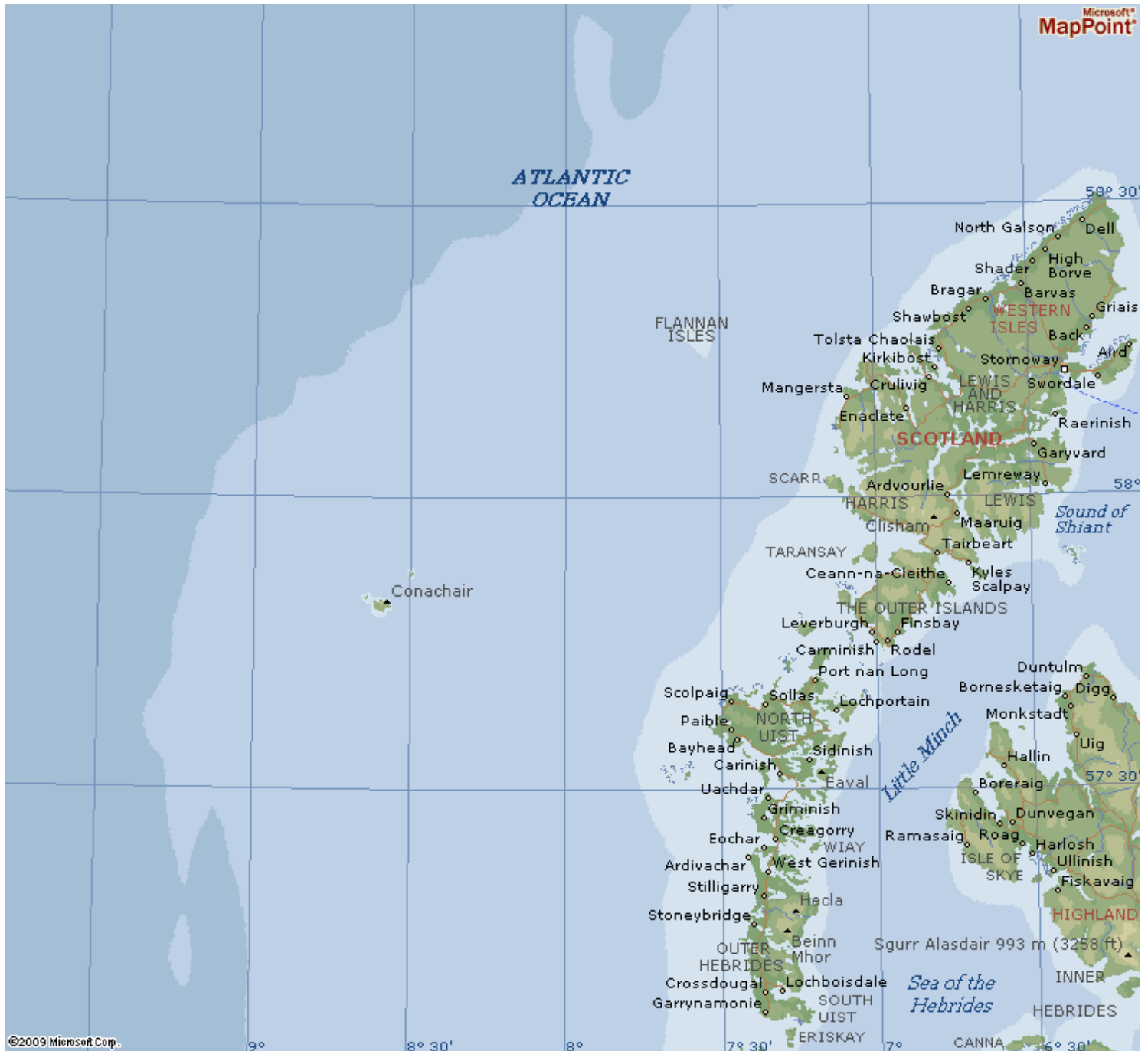


#### References:

Norway - RCC Pilotage Foundation by Judy Lomax (1<sup>st</sup> edition)  
Hamish Haswell Smith - The Scottish Islands p.484

## June & July

*Port Edgar to the Caledonian Canal*  
*Muck & Rum*  
*Carbost & Dunvegan*  
*North Uist - Loch Eport/Lochmaddy*  
*Stanton Channel - Sound of Harris*  
*Passage to Hirta - St Kilda*  
*Circumnavigation of St Kilda*  
*St Kilda to Barra Head*  
*Castlebay to Muck*  
*Eigg to Arisaig*



## Port Edgar to the West Coast via The Caledonian Canal

### Crew:

- Ken Jones
- Mike Bowley
- Brian Kerslake

26<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Brian had come back from his holiday in Ireland to help us sail Boomerang over to the west coast. From there, Mike and I planned to sail to St Kilda and if we were lucky, carry on down to the west coast of Ireland.

We left Port Edgar Marina at 2100 and goose-winged in a brisk south westerly. The night passage down the Forth estuary was uneventful and comfortable thanks to very little swell in the outer firth and we only motored for an hour between 0400 & 0500, before sailing north, enjoying good visibility and plenty of sun all day. We passed Aberdeen at 1350 making 6.8kn and continued sailing fast in wide, blue waves under a hot sun. Fraserburgh's street lights were just coming on as we turned into the Moray Firth. The sailing all the way from Port Edgar had been excellent but now in the face of a light headwind, we motored through to the next morning.

Passing Findhorn at 1100 we met the Round Britain Motor Boat Race, starting out on the east coast leg after transportation through the Caledonian Canal. What a spectacle to see about 50 ocean racing boats, speeding past either side of us. We must have had one of the best grandstand views possible.

By early afternoon the sun was hot and the air still so we moved in close to Culbin Sands for lunch. By late afternoon the wind returned for going through the Chanonry Narrows and we approached Kessock Bridge near low water. The navigation was quite tense in 2-4m of water when we were caught unawares by a tramp ship overtaking us port-side!

It was too late in the evening to enter by the sea-lock for at Clacknacarry and east of the canal entrance the newly constructed harbour looked uninviting, so we dropped anchor in a secluded spot further up the Beaully Firth.

Transiting the Caledonian Canal is good fun out of season but in the summer, it's all about collision-avoidance and queue-jumping the locks. Families on their first cruise boat charter present a hazard, especially if they get first into the lock basin then hang-back from the gate. Berths are hard to find so there's also a lot of holding a stationary position whilst waiting for the gates to open.

We spent a few hours at Seaport Marina and took on fuel and water at the same time as a passing squall. Mike travelled as far Dochgarroch then jumped ashore to meet his Dad who was waiting to drive him back home to Balloch. A strengthening southerly wind was now blowing in our faces and Brian and I began to have doubts about heading on into Loch Ness, however once we were underway and holding close to the west shore, we managed to keep in the lee and enjoyed a pleasant motor with lots of spray and chop, reaching Fort Augustus in 7 hours at night fall. We rafted alongside a 26' German yacht "Compadre" sailed by a couple from Dusseldorf. Next morning was glorious as we both set off together and started the climb through Fort Augustus Locks, trying our best to be nice to the motor cruisers and enjoying chatting to the tourists who had come to watch the parade of boats.

A steady drizzle set in and by mid afternoon we stopped to anchor overnight by Invergarry Castle on Loch Oich. Compadre pulled in to occupy the single shore-side pontoon, taking advantage of her shallow draft or lifting keel. We passed Lysa Blue belonging to Keith Parker, heading north just before this anchorage. An early start was planned for 0800 next morning so that we might escape the canal before it closed that evening. With so much traffic plying up and down there was no telling how long we'd be but after managing to arrive at the top of Neptune's staircase at 1240, we were told we couldn't start the descent until 1500!

We just made it, the last boat through the sealock at Corpach and into Loch Lhinne at 1730. Because of persisting southerly winds, there was no choice but to motor down towards the Corran Narrows. Unfortunately we arrived at the narrows on the ebb and smack bang into eddies and big short waves, deteriorating visibility and pouring rain. For an hour we struggled towards Loch Leven and eventually managed to set anchor in Kentallen Bay at 2030 and F7 winds, howling over the col behind the loch. We were 4 days from Port Edgar. The wind continued gusting to 40kn but our anchor was holding with a snubber until late in the afternoon, I thought I saw the shore-line getting closer! Under motor we shifted our anchorage further into the middle of the loch.

A 40' ketch was on a mooring further in and when it motored off heading north the next day we quickly shifted to take their place. Here we waited another full day before deciding to leave the boat and go home. We contacted Kat to drive over and collect us (bless her) and I left my contact details at the Kentallen Hotel. (*the mooring's owner phoned me a few days later and kindly reassured me he wouldn't be needing it for a few weeks*)

## St Kilda via Dunvegan and The Sound of Harris

### Crew

- Ken Jones
- Mike Bowley

Wednesday 8th July, Kat and I met Mike at Broxburn Bus Depot then drove through to Loch Kentallen. After inflating our dinghy on the beach we said goodbye to Kat and slipped the mooring around 1600, sailing in pleasant warm winds towards the Lynn of Lorne. We'd lost a sail slide but luckily we were close to Owen Sails at Bendochy so we anchored nearby at the head of Ardmuchnish Bay and in the morning, Mike went ashore for a replacement.

The journey up the sound of Mull was relaxed and we easily found a spare pontoon berth at Tobermory. I'm not fond of this Balamoryised town but do appreciate the fish and chips. The new pontoons have made a big difference in allowing easy access to fuel, water and the bar.

That night the wind was blowing almost gale force from the north and the swell at the pontoons gave an onboard impression of being in a seaway. It was the worst night I've ever spent in a marina and the guys on the moorings agreed; we'd not enjoy being there again in similar conditions!

*Tobermory Bay*



We'd planned to leave Tobermory in the morning and night passage across the Minch to Barra but we were delayed buying provisions ashore and getting access to the fuel berth, so it was 1645 when we sailed out into the sound. The wind was westerly 20kn gusting 30kn and cross seas made the sailing awkward. In worsening conditions and fading light we altered course for Muck, heading for Port Mor on the east side of the island. The entrance is now easy in most conditions thanks to the new ferry lights that guide you all the way into the harbour. We arrived at 0200 and anchored close to the pier because of the many other boats already there. You can avoid tangling with the MacBrain Ferry by getting clear of the harbour before 1000.

Next morning was by contrast perfect weather as we sailed in light winds for Loch Scresort, Rum. Here in the evening Mike stitch repaired our no.2 genoa UV strip while I cooked supper. We enjoyed an undisturbed night shared by 8 other yachts in the bay.

1030 next day on leaving Rum the wind was mostly southerly and blowing 20kn so we took the opportunity to sail through the Sound of Soay and poke our bow into Loch Scavaig, then on past Loch Brittle, heading north to Loch Bracadale. The aim as ever was to reach the Old Inn at Carbost before closing time and today we were sure to succeed as the wind speed increased and the clag closed in. On entering Loch Bracadale at 1700 it was bucketing cold rain and the wind blew hard over the stern, pushing us along at 9-10knots until we turned into the shelter of Loch Harport. We motored the last few miles in pouring rain towards Carbost, with ample time to anchor close to the pub for supper.

### *Carbost, Loch Harport*



The following day the mist was down and the forecast was for gales in the Hebrides (the CG were silent due to industrial action) so we stayed put and spent the afternoon in the pub chatting to an old yachtsman and his mate who'd come up from the Clyde. The older man was a colourful character with an irreverent attitude to the creeping over regulation of leisure boating.

Next morning (15<sup>th</sup> July) it was blustery from the northwest and we were keen to get away. At 1130 we headed out of Loch Harport, into Loch Bracadale then started to beat north towards Neist Point. We made the north going stream around the point at 1500 and for the rest of that day enjoyed a fine beat and just an occasional tack up to Loch Dunvegan. It's quite a few miles down to Dunvegan Village and we arrived at 2130, 10 hours from Carbost. We shopped ashore next morning and were just in time to stop our dinghy from being stolen by 3 local children. It was a shame because they had nobody to take them out in a boat and I found it hard not to feel a bit sorry for them.

Water was available from a hose at the main pier but it's not yacht friendly and it's best to use horizontally rigged fenders.

### *Loch Dunvegan and the Cuillins*



## Dunvegan to North Uist



Our passage across Little Minch to N Uist was an easy sail in 10-15kn wind that dropped about half way across. The crossing took 9hrs and we entered Loch Eport at 2230 to anchor at Acairsaid Lee in the north of the inner loch.



We stayed two full days at Loch Eport because of forecast gale force winds that never really materialised. In the evening on 20<sup>th</sup> July, with cabin fever rising, we left Loch Eport in 20kn wind and fair weather (but still a poor forecast) and took a mooring by the Ro-Ro pier at Loch Maddy. The next passage was through the Sound of Harris so we visited the Community Centre to check the "*Magic seaweed*" website. This forecasted more unstable weather but reasonable for the next 36hrs so next morning we sailed north to enter the Stanton Channel, the northern passage through the Sound of Harris. We'd decided in advance to escape to Taransay on Lewis at the western end of the sound if conditions were too poor for crossing to St Kilda.

## Sound of Harris - Stanton Channel

Visibility was poor with mist and rain and the wind was SW 20kn as we motored from mark to mark through the channel, reliant more on GPS fix as the buoys were difficult to spot in the clag. It wasn't easy and required constant concentration but the navigation marks turned out to be much better than described in my old pilot guide, once we actually got up close enough to see them.

We came out the west end of the sound at 1400 and sailed between Shilly and Pabbay in foul conditions and rising wind speed. Visibility was still very poor and the sea was rough with a SW 25kn wind but close-hauled on a port tack we were on a direct heading for St Kilda. The conditions were not great but neither of us wished to spend any more time at a windy anchorage and here we were presented with a wind to take us straight to St Kilda, 42nm at 270d.

Mike volunteered to go forward and tie down the anchor then retreated to his bunk feeling a bit worse for all the extreme pitching at the bow. We'd taken in 2 rolls on the genoa but with an un-reefed main I knew we were over-powered, but could do very little about it, other than get Mike back on deck to help reef. The wind remained 25kn but the sea was very confused and I figured as long as it didn't exceed 30kn we'd be ok un-reefed. Hand steering was going to be too tough, alone for next 8 hours, so with difficulty I crawled to the back of the cockpit to set-up the autopilot. Once set, I retreated to sit on the step under the sprayhood where I managed to wedge myself and hold on tight. I remained there for almost 9 hours, keeping watch as Boomerang ploughed impressively towards St Kilda in big confused seas. The wind stayed just under 30kn and the starboard deck was submerged to the lower level of the windows but we were making great progress.

At 2340hr and after a 9hr watch, we were 5 miles off St Kilda when I decided it was time to wake Mike from his bunk. He'll sleep through anything but is impressively ready to go as soon as he's up. As he took over the helm, I went below to the chart table.

To starboard the 200m cliffs of Stac An Armin on Boreray reared up jet black against the night sky. A swell added to the rough sea and after giving Mike a heading for Hirta, I took refuge in my bunk. I didn't get much rest as Mike was forced to tack often towards Loch Hirta, causing me to switch bunks over and over. With the prominent Dun headland to port, we started the engine to enter Village Bay but within minutes the overheating alarm went off. So we pumped the raw water inlet with the dinghy foot pump and this seemed to help, allowing us to motor with low revs into an anchorage off the jetty, in the north western corner of the bay. It was 0300 and we sat a few minutes contemplating our situation but quickly became aware of the swell and jumped back into our bunks until day break. Later, at anchor in Village Bay, I found the engine's over-heating had been caused by a raw water impeller vane breaking and lodging in the entrance to the header tank.

*Dun - view from our anchorage in Village Bay Hirta*



## St Kilda

The St Kilda archipelago is 42nm west of the North Uist and consists of Dun (it forms the south arm of Village Bay) Hirta, Soay and Boreray.

We rigged a yoke from the anchor chain to the main winch and this helped to dampen the boat's motion but the swell was horrible until about 1200 when we were able to launch the dinghy and paddle ashore. Earlier we'd watched "The Elizabeth G" enter the bay and struggle to get some tourists ashore in powerful RIBs. But we were luckier with the conditions and had an easy paddle to the harbour wall. The Spanish trawler wreck still lies on the rocks by the harbour. We'd called the NTS warden on the VHS and he told us he'd be out for the day. Some visitor information leaflets were at the pier but we didn't meet anybody to talk to and the famous "Puff Inn" was nowhere to be seen.

The military base on Hirta is now run by civilians and dominates the view from Village Bay. The military still service the base by helicopter.

## Wikipedia information about St Kilda

**St Kilda** (Scottish Gaelic: *Hiort*, pronounced [hirˠʲt̪]) is an isolated archipelago 64 kilometres (40 mi) west-northwest of North Uist in the North Atlantic Ocean. It contains the western-most islands of the Outer Hebrides of Scotland.<sup>[6]</sup> The largest island is Hirta, whose sea cliffs are the highest in the United Kingdom. The islands are administratively a part of the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar local authority area.

St Kilda was permanently inhabited for at least two millennia; its population probably never exceeding 180 (and certainly no more than 100 after 1851). The entire population was evacuated in 1930. Currently, the only residents are civilians working for the MOD and NTS wardens.

The origin of the name *St Kilda* is a matter of conjecture. The islands' human heritage includes numerous unique architectural features from the historic and prehistoric periods, although the earliest written records of island life date from the Late Middle Ages. The medieval village on Hirta was rebuilt in the 19th century, but the influences of religious zeal, illnesses brought by increased external contacts through tourism, and the First World War all contributed to the island's evacuation in 1930. The story of St Kilda has attracted artistic interpretations, including an opera.

The entire archipelago is owned by the National Trust for Scotland. It became one of Scotland's five World Heritage Sites in 1986 and is one of the few in the world to hold joint status for its natural and cultural qualities.<sup>[10]</sup> The islands are a breeding ground for many important seabird species including Northern Gannets, Atlantic Puffins, and Northern Fulmars. The St Kilda Wren and St Kilda Field Mouse are endemic subspecies.<sup>[3]</sup> Parties of volunteers work on the islands in the summer to restore the many ruined buildings the native St Kildans left behind. They share the island with a small military base established in 1957.

### *Mullach Sgar behind Village Bay with the tracking station for the Benbecula Range*



*Soay ram on Hirta*



After a miserable night in the swell, we were pleased to leave Loch Hirta next morning for an anti-clockwise circumnavigation of Hirta and Soay, stopping over to have a look at the alternative anchorage in Glen Bay.

*The anchorage at Loch a Ghlinne or Glen Bay - north side of Hirta*





It was overcast, dry and calm, with a light wind as we left St Kilda behind, heading SE for Barra Head, an 85nm over-night crossing.

### *Looking back into Village Bay - Hirta*



### Night passage from St Kilda to Berneray, Barra Head 85nm



At 2030 we were on a heading for the Sound of Barra but by the time I took the helm from Mike around 0600 the wind had shifted and strengthened F6, once more allowing a direct course for Barra Head, the southern tip of the Outer Hebrides.

*Berneray and Barra Head Lighthouse, built 1833 from locally quarried granite*



Once round Barra Head we motor sailed up the east side of Barra and into Castle Bay by 2130 and joined 10 other yachts on the HSE moorings. The town had a carnival (inebriated) atmosphere because a music festival was taking place. Next day the weather was brilliant so we toured the island by bus then in the evening left Castle Bay and via the "Fisherman's Passage" anchored for our last night in the Outer Hebrides, at Vatersay Bay. This passage is narrow, west of Snuasimul and quite difficult to locate but saves at least an hour when heading south from Castle Bay into Vatersay Bay.

*Castlebay – Barra*



The weather remained glorious as we crossed the Sea of Hebrides on passage to Muck. It was pond-like most of the way across but a mist developed and for most of our crossing, visibility was often reduced to under  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile. Despite this, the calm and tranquillity of the crossing was welcome and approaching the Small Isles in the sunset, the mists cleared and we had fabulous views to the east. Rounding the south of Muck we sailed into Port Mor, anchoring once more in the dark at 0230.



Next morning we visited Galmisdale on Eigg and had a pub lunch on the terrace at the harbour restaurant. The residents have a great set-up with restaurant, a small grocery, souvenir shop, post office and toilets. Bike hire is available and route maps for walks over the island starting from the pier. This was the hottest day of our trip and we were seeing Eigg at its very best, bustling with tourists in hot summer sun and clear blue skies.

### *Galmisdale*



It was near the end of our expedition and all that remained was the short sail across to Arisaig, This had been Boomerang's home port between 2005 and 2007 but Mike hadn't been there before and enjoyed good conditions for sailing all the way into Loch Ceann Traigh moorings, Arisaig.

*Foot-note*

We stopped sailing on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2008 and one month later Boomerang was lifted out for her hose down and preparation for selling. I'd decided we had to part company because the upkeep and sailing was becoming more and more difficult due to my muscle degeneration. Graham had erected a large shed at the marina and in the week before Christmas she went in for GRP work to the keel, replacement of a rudder pintel bush and some filling and faring.

Before placing Boomerang on the market I offered her to the Carolina Trust for sail training young people but the trust committee turned down the offer.

The "Apollo Duck" advert was very successful and out of 9 interested people, 3 came to view her at Arisaig in early December.

She was sold on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009 and one month later, after a paint job, her new owner, Eddie Crawford, sailed her back to the Clyde.