

Western Isles Cruise

A 2 week Cruise in Company from Largs Sailing Club

June 28th - July 12th 2008



The first major voyage of *Corshyecan*



Graeme and Marilyn Robertson

Western Isles Cruise
28 June - 12 July 2008.

Day 0 (Friday)

Evening pre-cruise meeting of the Largs Sailing Club Cruising Section at clubhouse. 6 boats, 14 adults, 2 children and 1 dog in cruise: *Corshyecan* (Graeme and Marilyn Robertson, your authors and, in the usual way, literary disclaimees), *Fiona* (George the cruise leader, Susan, Fiona, and Jane), *Machar* (Eileen, Matt and Kayley the dog), *Dram* (David, Kathryn, and children Sarah and Jack), *Bella Juno* (Norman and Terry), and *Oriole* (Alan and Ed), plus *Carpe Diem* (Alex and Marilyn) joining us for the 1st weekend. Having agreed that Tobermory would be our destination, unsettled weather outlooks meant that the Crinan passage was agreed.

Best fish and chips ever at *La Barca* (nee *Regattas*) restaurant at the marina, then aboard to settle in for the adventure ahead.

Day 1 (Saturday): Largs to Portavadie

Log: 31 miles

Wind SSW F4

Left Largs Marina at 1100, passing the fleet of resplendent and beautiful Fife yachts mustering for a week in the Clyde. *Fiona*, *Corshyecan* and *Dram* took the Kyles of Bute route (anti-clockwise of course!); others went around Garroch Head.



Fiona and Dram by Tighnabruaich

Arrived Portavadie at 1840; amazing new marina but no eaterie until March 2009. The crew of *Fiona* decided to try to get to Kames for dinner by taxi....On board we "created" a new pasta dish with tinned steak, tomato and broad bean sauce.... a "la Tuscani"?

Our fleet at Portavadie Marina



**Day 2 (Sunday): Portavadie to Cairnbaan
(a small village on the Crinan Canal)**

Log: 16 miles

Wind: W; F2-7

Frantic exit from Portavadie in 25kn wind: through some basic organisation and teamwork everyone manoeuvred out safely. There was some nifty ropework c/o David. Left to last, we reversed all the way out in strong winds. Gusty conditions meant we put two reefs in at the beginning. Then as wind dropped we let them both out. Mistake! Wind back with a vengeance and we struggled. Finally dropped sails completely and motored to Ardrishaig, the east end of the Crinan Canal, where we missed the last slot in the sealock and had to wait outside while the rest of the Largs group went up to the canal.



*Dram, Oriole and Bella Juno
in the sea lock; Corshyecan
waits outside.....*

Joined them later with *Pure Therapy* (who was determined to lock starboard too, as we wanted; we lost!) and *Sagan*. Joined others at Cairnbaan, rafted together on a calm evening and dinner together in the hotel to round off the day.

(Tim on Pure Therapy was sailing round Britain and the Outer Hebrides single-handed over 6 months!)



We are ready to leave Cairnbaan for the Atlantic!

Day 3 (Monday): Cairnbaan to Crinan

Log: 4 miles

Proceeded through canal with *Machar* really well, thanks to their friends Elaine and Tom who did all the lock gates for us both. Arrived Crinan mid afternoon and sorted out overnight berths: *Corshyecan* and *Machar* outside lock 14 and the others in the basin. We used our new folding bikes to cycle back up the towpath to let everyone know where the British Waterways girls wanted them to tie up. Marilyn then slept for 3 hours! Pleasant overnight, having dinner on board (pasta carbonara), and back to bed by 1030.

Day 4 (Tuesday): Crinan to Croabh

Log: 10 miles

Bit of a grim day, but tides looked right at 1000 to exit Crinan and get through the Dorus Mor. Slightly chaotic exit, but *Fiona*, *Corshyecan*, *Machar* and *Bella Juno* made the first escape with *Oriole* and *Dram* coming out after. Much hooting and yelling marked Largs Cruising Group's arrival to the Atlantic...then following George and crew on *Fiona* we all went through the Dorus Mor. Quite choppy and big 4-foot mid-sea standing waves; very exciting and a new experience for us!



Heading for the Dorus Mor

There was then a very short stint to Craobh Haven, arriving at 1320, where we all tied up on the same pontoon. Installed the new sound system for the boat; great sound and it all went well once we replaced the blown fuse. Enjoyable and sociable dinner for all of us in the Lord of the Isles ("LOTI") Hotel Graeme awake until 0400 - must be the excitement of it all.



The dining party at LOTI

Day 5 (Wednesday): Craobh

Log: 0 miles

As a result of last night's over imbibing and general fatigue, Graeme and Marilyn took a rest day at Craobh. *Fiona* left for Kerrera at about 1100. *Bella Juno* nearly

went, but was still around in the afternoon. Really relaxing day, fresh mackerel (30mins out of the water, caught by David and family) for lunch, and the day was rounded off by watching Andy Murray getting beaten by Nadal in the quarters at Wimbledon. Bumped into Kenny and Barbara, who initially inspired us with their trip and log of an extended sailing holiday on their Europa 240 out of Port Edgar in 2002. Then had dinner with Matt and Eileen (and Kayley, keeping our feet warm). Ed joined us for a beer later as did David after walking with the family to Ardfern and back for dinner. Relatively early night.

Day 6 (Thursday): Craobh to Kerrera

Log: 21 miles

Wind: Variable F2/3

The 5 remaining boats left at 1030 under Norman's lead on *Bella Juno*, with his commentary over the VHF giving us lots of useful tips on anchorages and inlets we were passing en route. Pleasant sail down to the headland (decided not to do Cuan Sound!), but wind soon dropped altogether. Motor sailed a bit then gave up with sails and motored from Seil Island to Kerrera.



En route to Kerrera

Arrived in procession around 1445 and once again, moored together on same pontoon. Brilliant sunshine and temperature of about 24°C. Short walk to monument to see Sound of Mull, by which time rain started again and we had to dash back to the boat to close hatches and retrieve towels hung out to dry. Decided to give Oban a miss this time and eat at the seafood bar on Kerrera: *The Waypoint Bar and Grill*. Fantastic! Graeme had oysters and we both had grilled salmon. Great value and terrific location. Just like a Mediterranean beach bar...



The first of many dinners at the Waypoint Bar and Grill.

Meanwhile *Fiona* was on her way that day through the Sound of Mull to Tobermory. Despite the different sailing plans mobile phone contact was kept up and so the group remained 'together'.

Day 7 (Friday): Kerrera to Tobermory.

Log: 25 miles

Wind: E F4

Decided to leave ahead of planned midday schedule as there was a Clyde Cruising Club race, of 32 boats, ending at Tobermory, leaving Kerrera at 1100. *Oriole* had to stay at Kerrera for the week as their holiday time was over, so we were down to 4 boats in the second group. *Bella Juno* took the lead, followed by *Machar* and *Corshyecan*, with *Dram* leaving last. Out of the harbour and clear of ferries, we got the sails up and had a potter across to Lismore. Currents through there were lively, and we saw some porpoises enjoying themselves in them.



The Sound of Mull

Mixture of sailing and motor sailing up the Sound of Mull, got us to Tobermory at about 1600. Spotted some good sailing opportunities in Lochs Aline and Shuna, and also planned to try and get to Coll and/or Tiree in the next day or so. The CCC racers piled in around 1900 and the marina was full of chatter and high spirits.



Corshyecan arrives Tobermory.....



joined by CCC and better weather.

Wonderful sunshine appeared from somewhere....

By late afternoon *Fiona* and crew returned from her advanced brigade day sail to the island of Coll. The whole cruising group are now re-united again, and hear from George all about yesterday's opening of the brand new toilet facilities by Princess Anne and the Red Hot Chilli Pipers outdoor evening concert in the car park beside the marina.

Dinner on board (roast chicken, tatties and broccoli), then had a drink with David, Kathryn, Sarah and Jack on our boat, before joining them for a nightcap on *Dram*. What a boat that is!! Better night sleeping in the aft cabin although we were woken with slapping water at about 0730.

Day 8 (Saturday)

Log: 0 miles (remember it is our annual holiday!)

The CCC racers left Tobermory before we woke up. *Fiona* changed her crew as planned which, after farewells and welcomes, became George, Susan, Donald and Arthur.

A rest day for us at Tobermory. Much expenditure in the silver shop. Delicious live cheeses and lots of re-ropeing of the boat and the reunited group eat together al fresco and enjoy a wee dram at the Mishnish hotel. Coll? Tiree? Maybe tomorrow...we'll see!



The reunited cruising group.

Day 9 (Sunday): Tobermory to Kerrera

Log: 26 miles

Wind: NE F2-4

Barometer had dropped from 1010 to 990 in 24hrs.

Alas we are now on our homeward journey, having decided the conditions were becoming too unsettled for us to venture further out. But we decided to accept that for now! A little sail for a while but making slow progress. Decided on the iron sail. Where did that small ferry come from? - aha the narrow entrance to Loch Aline on our port side. Enjoyed our passage through the south end of Lismore Island, and the effects of the swirling current. The weather was bright and sunny as we headed eastwards towards Oban. We did think of exploring Dunstaffnage marina but the thought of the Kerrera seafood bar was overwhelmingly mouth-watering, so we pressed on. It was a strange feeling to arrive there and see *Dram* and *Oriole* tied up without the crews whose company we had so enjoyed during the first week. They were on their way home, due to return a week later to bring their boats back to Largs. A quick phone call to David was made to confirm if Graeme could finish off zipping up *Dram's* sailbag - they must have left in a hurry to catch the train from Oban to Glasgow!

Day 10 (Monday): Kerrera revisited for a day's relaxation

Log: 0 miles

Fiona headed off today with the intention to make a fast passage back to Largs via the Mull of Kintyre. The weather was looking rather variable and, as we felt

shorthanded for what might turn out to be quite challenging sail, we decided not to join them. While this decision was being made, Matt produced a wonderful piping session, filling our pontoon with a hearty rendition of Scotland the Brave. We have a video recording of this memorable event for anyone who wishes to experience it.

Time to tell you a little bit more about Kerrera. It is a small island effectively protecting Oban Bay from the elements, and is home to Oban marina. There is definitely a feeling there of safety and isolation from the mainland, although fresh water supplies not always are available: it was quite intriguing to see the water tanks being ferried over from the mainland. The marina provides an hourly boat taxi from early morning - to ferry the island's children to school in Oban - until late at night should you be enjoying the evening fare of food and pubs etc which Oban offers. We used this free service today to re-provision *Corshyecan* and enjoy some time in bustling Oban. There is also a twice daily seaplane service to and from Glasgow, and plans for a full passenger pontoon to be installed in the next few months.



Fresh water arrives on Kerrera

In Oban, we equipped ourselves with Crocs....that brand of footwear Marilyn had previously sworn she would not be seen dead in! Extremely comfortable.

Then, back on Kerrera we enjoyed dinner at the seafood bar with Matt, Eileen, Norman and Terry. The seafood bar looks over the marina and beyond to Oban. A decked area for the tables is covered on three sides by an awning. At one side of the decking is the seafood bar counter which serves a wide choice of very fresh seafood delivered daily by a fishing boat on its way home to Oban. On the other side is a small octagonal (or hexagonal?) garden gazebo and hatch from where a different proprietor serves a range of drinks from soft through to bottled beers, spirits and a reasonable selection of wines. In our opinion, it is a charming environment to spend a while or an evening in, and not burn a big hole in your pocket! *(The Chief Editor's Office has not exercised it's editorial discretion but has added her comments as follows: "As observed in previous logs ghost-written by Graeme, he clearly still has a*

frustrated ambition to be a Visit Scotland publicity writer. The CEO accepts no responsibility for the implications of his comments or views, even though privately she fully shares them!")

Day 11 (Tuesday): Kerrera to Ardfern

Log: 25 miles

Wind: NW F2/3

An early morning get-together confirmed our passage back through the Sound of Luing, and the Dorus Mor which we had plotted the previous evening - two or three times over! The plan was to head either to the marina at Ardfern or directly to Crinan Basin, depending as always on the weather.

Contact with *Fiona* confirmed that they had made great progress yesterday and were at the new pontoon at Craighouse on Jura. They expected to be back at Largs by Thursday.

In very light winds we decided to motor out of Kerrera, and progressed at leisure down the Firth of Lorne towards Easdale, taking in the fabulous scenery. Visibility exceptionally good and we had a stunning view of the island of Colonsay from about 20 miles in clear bright sunshine.

Entered the Sound of Luing and caught the tide giving us 11kn speed with the engine ticking over. This meant we arrived at Dorus Mor well ahead of schedule, but the calm conditions meant we had an anti-climactic, easy passage. Even the Gulf of Corryvreckan, behind us, looked benign from our very safe distance!



A rapid passage through the Sound of Luing

Taking advantage of the breeze, all three boats had a pleasant sail up Loch Craignish to Ardfern Marina. Safely tied up, we had a wander and identified the dining opportunity, The Galley of Lorne Inn (GOLI?). Had an excellent dinner with Matt and Eileen (and Kayley) with Norman and Terry arriving to eat later. We then all enjoyed a nightcap on board *Machar*.

Day 12 (Wednesday)

Log: 0 miles

Wind: Variable 2-4

Making the most of being on holiday we took a rest day at Ardfern. And did absolutely nothing!

Bella Juno left for Crinan in the late morning and we had a brief wander to see if we could spot Princess Anne's boat.

We were joined on the pontoon by a couple of Irish boats..one being towed in following engine failure en route from Northern Ireland. They seemed quite unfazed by the experience, happily recounting other exciting episodes on previous trips. They were regular visitors to Scotland, travelling every year from Larne. The current crossing, done as ever in one go, had been one of the roughest, and taking its toll on crew who were feeling pretty ill. Until their first G&T...

Had dinner with Matt and Eileen at the GOLI although we had to eat inside as it was getting cooler.

Day 13 (Thursday): Ardfern to Cairnbaan

Log: 10 miles

Wind: Variable 2-3

A very murky morning awaits...low cloud and mist as we left Ardfern with *Machar* at 0800 to meet Donald McTavish, our Crinan 'pilot', at Lock 13 on the canal at 1000. We found him cycling along towards us, and with no further ceremony, started working our way back up the canal, gradually getting back into the swing of the ropes and boat handling in the locks. As we settled down, banter increased and we were joined by a small yacht with 2 adults, 3 children and very little food on board. Despite flagging energy levels the children helped Donald with the lock gates getting us up to Cairnbaan by 1540. We decided to make the rest of the canal passage the next day and Donald showed how flexible he was in agreeing to this at no extra charge. We had a much needed afternoon pint and nap then had our first dinner party on board: pasta Bolognese with Matt and Eileen (and Kayley). Feeling quite good about still being together on Day 13! Also keeping in good contact with *Fiona*, who has gone back around the Mull, and were now safely in Rothesay.

Day 14 (Friday): Cairnbaan to Tarbert

Log: 14 miles

Wind: NW F4

Met up with Donald at 1000 as planned and arrived at the Ardrishaig sealock at 1145. After embraces from Donald for Eileen and Marilyn, we left and sailed down to Tarbert with only the genoa up, arriving there at 1445. *Machar* had found a solid rafting opportunity alongside a decommissioned fishing boat and we rafted alongside her. Kayley has become quite an expert boat dog over the past two weeks and happily made the trip ashore over the fishing boat and even came aboard to see us later in the evening. Next lesson for Kayley, dinghy craft.



This is how its done Kayley.....

Perhaps the most unusual boat and crew of the entire voyage arrived at Tarbert that evening: a wood and canvas curragh, *Colmcille*, which was re-tracing St Columbus' journey to bring Christianity to Scotland in the 6th Century AD. Propelled by 10 sets of human muscles, a couple of small dark red sails and a 6hp outboard for emergencies, they were obviously having a ball! All supplies and kits were stored in large blue containers which also acted as floatation devices. After examining the boat and chatting to the crew, we gratefully went back to the comfort of *Corshyecan*...



How the other half "holiday"

After a walk to the stone seafood shed by the ferry slipway, to buy scallops (£7.50 for half a kilo) for tomorrow's return to Largs, we had dinner al fresco at the (bright yellow) Victoria Hotel, on what was our last night together with our company cruisers, Matt and Eileen.

Day: 15 (Saturday): Tarbert to Largs

Log: 35 miles

Wind: NW F4 occ 5

Barometer 1006



We wave Machar goodbye....for now.

Not the best of weather for our last day's sailing. We left Tarbert at 1345 in NW F5 deciding to head back to Largs clockwise through the Kyles for comfort. In increasingly better conditions we had a fantastic sail, leaving Rothesay bay at 1800 and taking the less direct route home anticlockwise around Great Cumbrae. It was a beautiful summer evening and we got back to Largs at 2030, to enjoy our scallops with bacon and a bottle of fizz to celebrate a great 15-day cruising holiday.

Looking back, this was a tremendous and sometimes challenging experience, sailing with people with more knowledge of the waters, and putting our trust in them and their passage planning thoughts and advice. And then, gaining confidence in our own dayskipper abilities, especially during an off-and-on coastguard industrial action, and getting to know our new 9-month-old boat better. There was great camaraderie and teamwork throughout with everyone helping each other, and being flexible to all our differing needs, ambitions and timescales. Also, the wonderful seafood diet made us feel happy and healthy.

The cruising in company bug definitely has bitten us, and proves to us (at least) that cruising company is the best way to enjoy an extended cruise and holiday,

especially if your and/or other boats are short-handed. We are so eager for the next trip in 2009!



Back "home"

Total distance covered: 213 miles

We are happy to share more photos and an extensive collection of video clips from this voyage with anyone who is interested. You can email us: