

Scottish Cruise, 1996, Summary

In early August, 1996, I had the great good fortune to serve as crew aboard Mike Bolton's yacht *Revel*. I had met Mike and his wife Patsy the previous year when, by coincidence, we chartered for the same week aboard *Lorne Leader*, a gaff ketch rigged Brixham Trawler of 100 tonnes built in 1892. In the 1990's, *Lorne Leader* was sailing the Western Isles of Scotland with working charter crews.

Mike was the consummate yachstman. He was well known in yachting circles on the west coast of Scotland and, more widely, throughout Britain. When I sailed with him, he was a member of the Royal Cruising Club and had contributed greatly to cruising in that area by co-founding and acting as Secretary of the West Highland Anchorages and Moorings Association.

For two consecutive seasons, vizt., 1996 and 1997, I was invited to crew aboard his Oban based yacht *Revel*, a Rival 34. With him and his daughter Sally, I enjoyed a total of four wonderful weeks of cruising the Scottish Isles. This document chronicles the first of those cruises.

During my first cruise aboard *Revel*, we visited Islay of single malt fame, Ireland, crossed the Irish sea, and sailed along the Mull of Kintyre. In all, we covered approximately 320 nautical miles. A short distance by ocean cruising standards, but what the cruise lacked in miles under the keel it more than compensated in variety and interesting sailing.

Sadly, Mike succumbed to a stroke in 2004 and is no longer with us. It was a privilege and an honour to have met and sailed with him.

Sailing Highlights

The Start, Oban — July 30, 1996

I flew overnight from Pearson airport in Toronto to Glasgow, arriving in Glasgow on the morning of July 31. After waiting a few hours, I took the train north to Oban.

Mike met me at the station and we returned to his home. There I met his wife Patsy and, for the first time, his daughter Sally. Following a light meal, we went down to the harbour and rowed out to *Revel* on her mooring.

On the first of August, we sailed off the mooring and had a good sail covering thirty-eight nautical miles in less than six hours. We anchored for the night on the west coast of Jura at Drumnatudh. I was cook for the night and prepared lamb chops, potatoes, and a simple salad.

The next day, we slept in a bit but then raised anchor and sailed south to Islay. We negotiated a tricky entrance strewn with rocks, but anchored in a beautiful sand bottom bay with excellent holding. A short walk ashore led past the low whitewashed stone warehouses of a distillery.

south to Ireland

On August 3, we continued south and were able to use the Aries wind vane to do most of the steering. As we neared the end of the Mull of Kintyre, the wind died and we continued with the assistance of a favourable tidal current. We got as far as Red Bay on the north-east coast of Northern Ireland, where we anchored for the night.

After leaving Red Bay, we continued south with a rough beat windward and made our way in to Belfast Lough. We anchored in Ballyholme Bay off Bangor on the south shore of Belfast Lough. As the forecast for the next day was southerly gales, we decided on a rest day and motored, for the first time on the trip, around the corner into Bangor Marina. The day was spent putting a few stitches into a worn seam on the headsail, a walk into town, a swim and shower at the local Leisure Centre, purchase a few provisions, and then back aboard for an early night.

August 6 proved to be an interesting day on the water. We left Bangor at a little past 09:00. Timing was critical as we needed to catch the south flowing tide in the Irish Sea, but not arrive too early at the entrance to Strangford Lough, our destination. The latter is a very difficult entrance on the flood tide as the current in the channel can be up to seven knots.

As luck would have it, we enjoyed a grand downwind run in front of a northerly force 4 gusting 5. With the tidal current helping, we easily maintained seven knots over the ground. We entered Strangford Lough under engine power, a rare occurrence when sailing with Mike, and motored to the Quoile River and Quoile Yacht Club.

Pilotage in Strangford Lough is remarkably difficult. The lough is shallow and filled with shifting sand bars that are marked only with a branch or stick stuck into the sand by local yachtsmen. Vigilance is certainly the order of the day.

The next few days were spent exploring Strangford Lough. From Quoile we went to Killyleigh and then, even further up the lough, the County Down Yacht Club. There, we moored on the club's pontoon next to the club house, which is a decommissioned and converted light ship. Then down to the lough entrance to anchor and wait for a favourable tide the next morning.

Return to Scotland

On August 9, we left Strangford Lough on a favourable tide and crossed the Irish Sea to Portpatrick. A somewhat bouncy sail while we dodged the occasional high speed ferry between Belfast and Stranraer was followed by a few tense minutes as we approached Portpatrick. The entrance to this old ferry port, although not difficult, was difficult to see in the conditions and generated some anxiety on board. Safely in and then rafted alongside a few yachts against the vertical harbour walls.

The next day, we headed north into the last half of the cruise. We anchored at the island of Standa off the south end of the Mull of Kintyre and had a short run ashore. Then, up anchor and on the Cambelltown. The wind faded as we approached, so we prepared and ate dinner as a favourable tide carried us to the harbour.

We were away early the next day and rounded the Mull of Kintyre on our way to Gigha, where we anchored for the night. The weather was good as the anchorage at Gigha has very little shelter.

On August 12, we raised anchor off Gigha and continued north up the sound of Islay to a tiny speck of an island named Eilean Mór which contains a remarkably small but very well sheltered anchorage.

The island of Eilean Mór, which is held in trust by the Scottish Nationalist Party, is normally uninhabited with the exception of a few sheep. However, on this occasion, a small group of Nationalists were at work building a small stone hut intended to become a visitor centre. As with most such islands, it has a rugged beauty but is also blessed with the remains of a twelfth century stone chapel and a few beehive cells which were used as living quarters by monks.

And, then, back to Oban

On August 13, after our two weeks of cruising, we returned to Oban via the Sound of Jura. There was very little wind as we were carried north up the sound by the tidal current. The sea was calm and the quiet was punctuated only by the cries of the sea birds.