

Covid was not the problem; no wind was. But it was still a busy summer. Initially, the plan was to introduce Steve, my new co-owner of the boat, to ocean sailing. At first we were aiming for the Faroes, an open sea crossing of some three days north from Stornoway. But then Faroes went from Green to Red in a flash for visiting, so that was out. Well, let's try for Shetland, or failing that Orkney at least. But there was still no wind.

We started from Appin on Loch Linnhe on the west coast of Scotland, on engine of course. Down Loch Linnhe, up the Sound of Mull and into Loch Drumbuie, opposite Tobermory on Oronsay, for the night. A favourite hurricane hole of an anchorage, but it has one disadvantage. The surrounding hills cut out all communications. But we did not need a forecast next morning to tell us it was going to be fine and windless in this incredible summer we were having in Scotland.

So, we motored again, past the west side of Canna for a change and into the Minch. It was still calm and sunny, and we kept a relaxed watch system amongst the three of us – Rachel, one of my daughters, had also joined us for the trip. All was well if not exactly exciting as we proceeded on autohelm, until suddenly we had to slow the engine to make some adjustment, and for some unknown reason the autohelm refused to work from then on. We had to hand steer, and continued to do so through the night, finally putting into a bay on the south side of the approach into Stornoway at about 0230 hrs for the rest of the night. I had not been into Stornoway for many years and discovered next morning they now have pontoons in there instead of having to moor up against the quayside as before. But the Stornoway seal still seems active though maybe it is the pup of the original, plus partner!

We filled with fuel after all that motoring but were not pleased to be charged for a whole day's stay when we had only been there two or three hours. The wind, what wind there was, had been continually from the north and now it increased considerably. Hard on the strong wind, we were still not going to make it round Cape Wrath. We cut our losses and in the dead of night made our way down the long Loch Laxford. On Dodo's Delight the chartplotter is at the chart table, which is fine for ocean sailing but not for stealing down Scottish lochs in total darkness. But Steve had Navionics on a tablet, so we were alright, until we were brought up short hitting a line of unlit mussel floats attached together. We managed to circumvent these and found a well-protected bay at the far end. As conditions continued frisky even in the anchorage we stayed an extra day here to let the front pass through.

Despite this, and the care we took to get the tides right, Cape Wrath lived up to its name and was decidedly lively. We were anxious about that rock a little way off the point which we eventually spotted with all the spray flying over it. From there we cut in towards the shore as it looked calmer and gradually the sea eased somewhat. We put into one of the bays further along this north shore of Scotland and found a rather strange cleft which gave some shelter, though it was still subject to swell.

It was now decision time. This bane of proper sailing: time constraints. Were we going to have time to go to Shetland and back? Steve and Rachel had only just a little over two weeks for the trip. We came to the conclusion that if we went to Shetland we would only have a day there. We would have more time if we went to Orkney and opted for that instead.

It turned out to be an inspired decision. Not only did we get a close-up view of the Old Man of Hoy, a mecca for all climbers, as we sailed past, but in Stromness we met up with the 23-metre yacht Louise. You will not be surprised to hear that the owner Grant Gordon is something to do with Grant whisky, and Gordon gin may be in there somewhere. We were liberally entertained that evening; the drinks were perfect! I also had opportunity to visit the John Rae Society here, and to view the house, Clestrain which they are restoring, where he grew up before going off to the Arctic and becoming the

best of the arctic explorers of that era – what might be termed the Franklin Disaster era. It was he who discovered the last missing link of the North-West Passage. We also explored Scapa Flow, with its historical connections. Steve and Rachel snorkelled over one of the wrecks from World War 2, though I am not convinced they saw anything!

All too soon it was time to head back. Of course, the constant north breeze now went into the south. Cape Wrath was as lively as ever though as we motor sailed past with some main up as a steadying sail. We then gybed south and made our way home via the Kyle of Lochalsh, and the bridge ‘over the sea to Skye’. I got Steve to take us down the Sound of Sleat but it was all very benign; no huge standing waves at the southern end which I had encountered with a rude shock on a previous occasion. So, we continued south mainly on engine, round Ardnamurchan Point, down the Sound of Mull, putting into Lochaline for a night’s sleep before continuing to our mooring in Dallens Bay, Appin. A thoroughly enjoyable trip, in a sea kindly boat whatever the conditions.

I have to say the next trip was a contrast. A friend wanted to take his Westerly 38-foot Typhoon to Tenerife so he could live on her there for the winter. It all started fine, though I was slightly surprised to anchor in the Garvellachs the first night, south facing with a southerly breeze. But the swell was slight, and next day we made our way south to Ireland until we ran out of breeze altogether and put into Aran Island to wait. I became conscious of a slight lack of information at this stage: the skipper and Leonie the other crew member would go ashore in the dinghy and I was left wondering what was happening and when. But then the skipper had nearly always sailed completely on his own before, and maybe I was slow on the uptake. We continued south down the west coast of Ireland without incident, sailing through the Blaskett Islands – I was unaware at that point of their huge historical interest – and so to Dingle.

Here there was a pleasant surprise; we tied up in front of the aluminium yacht *Northabout*, last seen on the west coast of Greenland on their way to the North-West and North-East Passages. In fact, we met again at 75°30N at sea for a handover of Polly’s camera which she had left on board on a visit in Nuuk! *Northabout* was under new ownership, but lo and behold, I also met Jarlath, who had built her, ashore there in Dingle. He had come to help the new owner. Wonderful!

We elected to go to a bay to the west for the night to be ready for an early start in the morning. This was a mistake as it was open to the east and even though we moved once the swell was uncomfortable. Next morning, we set off in a strong east wind. The skipper put two reefs in the main and asked, ‘how is that do you think?’. Not being used to the boat in stronger wind I paused. ‘I think it might be better with another reef’. Fortunately, it was. So, we sailed on south past the intriguing beehive shelters of Skellig Michael - ‘the monks must have been mad’, was the skipper’s comment! And so to the outskirts of the Bay of Biscay.

For three days we made progress without incident, but then the wind went south, and we were hard on the wind for three days. I passed on a nugget of wisdom I had been given years ago, ‘on ocean passages to windward, *close reach* on the making tack’, but we continued hard on the wind towards the mark. Bouncy and uncomfortable. When the wind eventually relented we did motor for a few hours to sweep by the Tower of Hercules Light and into La Coruna - a gentler motion at last.

To my surprise we did not check in immediately but went round to Ares. But we did not leave the boat except to swim around it, and lunch, sitting in the cockpit, in the sun, was very pleasant after all that hard work. When we did check in, there was absolutely no trouble re Covid - they seemed almost in denial over it. We enjoyed our time in northern Spain including anchorages off Muxia, who were having some sort of festival at the time which included local bagpipes! Then again round the corner of Cape Finisterre to the Rias – such as at Porto do Son and the islands of Ons and Cies, and a bay well protected from the north wind which surprisingly turned out to be ‘a popular nudist beach’. A bit of a shock! Finally, we arrived at Baiona (Bayona).

The well-known yacht club there were welcoming, but we were bemused not to be able to have a meal or a drink in the clubhouse. Members only. So, we had a meal ashore, and inspected the small and rather ungainly replica of the *Pinta* - Baiona was Columbus's first port of call on returning in 1493 from 'discovering' America. When author Philip Marsden started sailing he was advised, 'Choose your weather: the patient sailor always has fair winds'. Our skipper may have had many virtues, but patience was not one of them! We put out into strong winds and two reefs soon became three. 'Why are we here?' 'It said only up to 22 knots'; he must have forgotten it is always best to add five to ten knots to GRIB file forecasts. It continued to increase. We tried heaving-to but discovered we couldn't; too much sail and we were down to the fullest extent without rigging trysails and storm sails, which we had not made ready before leaving. In the end we could just run before with a well rolled genoa.

The problem was that this was a Performance Cruiser. Comparatively light displacement, nippy and fast. By the same token then in strong winds and big seas she was skittish, frisky and bouncy. 'One hand for the ship and one hand for yourself': no chance, two hands and two feet if possible to remain upright in the violent motion! At one stage we were doing 8 knots running before under bare poles. We had two difficult days running before in big seas before it finally began to relent. The boat had its revenge on me for being so rude about it; a violent lurch when I was reaching for a line and I was thrown across the cockpit and banged and bruised my back badly, which further reduced my ability to winch and help. Getting old?

By contrast we had to motor the last miles to Porto Santo. For two days it was bliss here, sunshine, light breeze and little swell. Then the wind went north, and we were subject to violent gusts and williwaws coming down from the hilly slopes to the north, even after we had moved into the harbour. And the boats going round and round did not do so in unison, which was disturbing for fear of collision at anchor.

Leonie left us here to attend a course at home. The skipper and I were on our own for the last 300 miles to Tenerife. It was a reasonable passage mainly broad reaching, but watch on, watch off is exhausting at the end of a 2000 miles passage, and the autohelm broke down on the last night. It was a relief to pull into Santa Cruz marina, Tenerife, where the skipper intended to spend the winter.

So, a Westerly Typhoon? An ideal boat for passages sailing by day and anchoring at night. Fast with high performance. But not a good boat for continuous ocean or open sea passages, though to be fair part of the trouble was there were insufficient reefing lines for shortening sail on this boat. But then it was also difficult to make proper sea berths down below for instance, and it was *too* lively!

There was a further short trip, in a Sweden 42 on the west coast of Scotland. The weather was atrocious, rain and strong winds gusting up to 30 knots. But the Sweden 42 just sailed on smoothly, serenely and sublimely, taking no notice of the awful conditions. What a marvellous contrast!



