

ROUND THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND

SUMMER 2018

Text Andries Broersma
Drawings Jan De Vestele



Clear Blue at Eriskay

After sailing for the fifth time in West Scotland we, my regular sailing mate Johan and I, decided that we want the experience off a big adventure in that area. A period of six days is too short; three weeks is the minimum that we need.

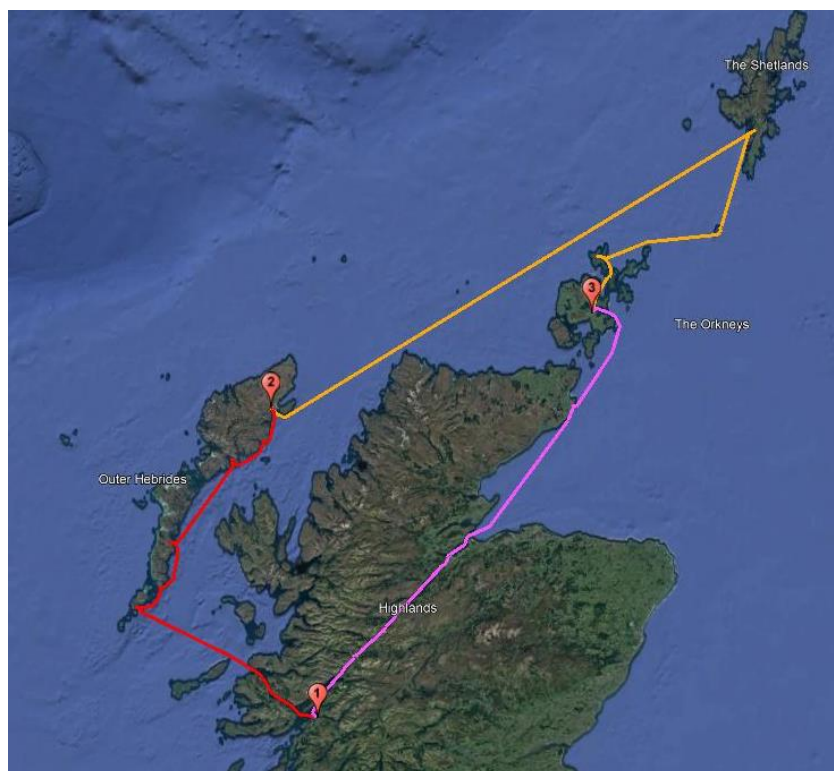
Without much discussion we agreed on the charter company and the departure port: Alba Sailing from Dunstaffnage.

The first idea was to go to the Orkney Islands after hopping the east coast of the Hebrides, returning along the east shore of Scotland and then passing through the Caledonian Canal. In addition to the Reeds, we bought the pilots off all the areas. Soon we had the ideal route on paper including several fall-back scenarios.

December 2017, we made the reservation for the boat. In the meantime, Jan, an experienced sailor, joined the team. Now we have three sailors on board with more than 50,000 nm sailing experience.

We divided the trip in three equal parts all with its own characteristic. Five friends were interested to join us for a part of the voyage. So, we introduced to stops (Stornoway and Kirkwall) for trading places.

The initial program could be a bit more ambitious. The 60-degree latitude had to be passed: the Shetland Islands! This destination was from now on included in the most ideal sailing schedule.



The planning

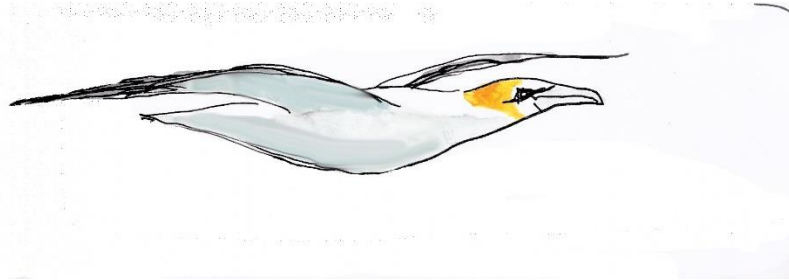
On the 14 July, the first group arrives on Saturday afternoon in the Marina Dunstaffnage, just above Oban. David and Julie, the owners of Alba Sailing, prepared the Clear Blue for the voyage. A tough Westerly of 38 ft. A boat that doesn't resemble the current generation of sailboats. This boat is the type of boat we will need in this area.

Week 1: The Outer Hebrides

The weather report: not too cold, maybe some little rain and enough wind to sail.

We left the marina and went to Loch Aline and dropped anchor. The next day we arrived in the lovely Tobermory, left the Clear Blue at the mooring and made a nice walk along the shore.

The longest leg the first week is the crossing of the Sea of Hebrides towards Barra. A beautiful day with 15 knots of wind from the South.



There was too much swell for anchoring in Vatersay Bay, so we chose for the brand new pontons in Castlebay. Luckily for us was that a local fisherman was willing to sell his catch of the day. Twenty-five of the biggest scallops I have ever seen went directly to our kitchen.

A must-see on the islands are the western beaches. So, the next morning we rented some bicycles (also electric!) and made a tour around the island. Highlights were the airport on the beach in the north and the west side Vatersay Bay.

The next days we sailed north. First Eriskay then Loch Skipport on South Uist and Scalpay where in the North Harbour a new ponton is placed.



Scalpay

From the site www.walkhighlands.co.uk we download the circular walk on our handheld GPS. With the lighthouse as the farthest point it is stroll of 13 km partly through rough terrain that is easily passable in dry conditions.

From Wednesday on we started to follow the weather forecast more accurately. You can't rely on the long-term predictions, but we try to find a trend. It seemed that the southern stream would continue followed by a period of no wind at all.

Friday it was clear: Saturday is a strong wind up to Bft 6 from the Southwest which is followed Sunday morning by calm weather. We go to the Shetland Islands!

After we refueled, we found a place in the yachtharbour of Stornoway. The new companions Cedric and John were already there to replace Olivier and Joke.

Week 2: The Shetlands and Orkney Islands

Saturday morning, we left Stornoway and 36 hours later we had travelled the 220 nm to Lerwick. In the first twilight we put the boat in the center of the town at the pontoon.



Lerwick

While the European mainland sighed under a heat wave, we had to deal with 16 degrees. The goal, beyond the 60 degrees north latitude was reached and the reward is a beautiful city in a surprising environment. The visit to the very good museum taught us a lot about how the elements created this landscape at the corner of Europe.

The Monday evening, the first messages came in for an imminent storm. Now you need that little luck and we got that. We had to leave the Shetlands, but we will come back.

Tuesday with no wind we left to the south for the first stopover on Fair Isle. What a place!



Fair Isle

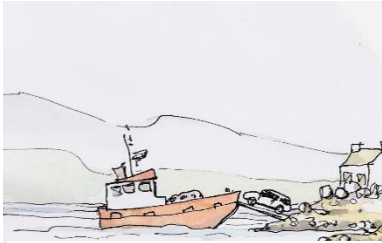
Under a clear blue-sky sun in a paradise environment we have made a great walk on this virtually uninhabited island with a huge bird colony. In hindsight, this place has made the most impression.

We had to go further and with an ever-increasing wind we are in time for the tide that brought us to Kirkwall, the capital of the Orkneys.

Thursday it blew hard, but not the storm that we feared. A nice day to rent bikes and explore the whole Mainland with all its prehistoric excavations. Very interesting.

Week 3: Calendonian Canal

Friday, we said goodbye to Cedric and John and Katrien came to accompany us the last week. Again, a puzzle because there was a lot of wind from SW predicted for Sunday afternoon.



Ferry Cromarty

Luckily, we found a small window with a SE-wind of up to 26 knots. After a short debriefing we left the same afternoon with the last passing tide towards Inverness. At the North Sea we picked up the south-going flood tide and stayed at an enough distance from the Pentland Firth to avoid being dragged into it. With a strong wind on the bow and a bumpy sea it was not a comfortable ride but there were no complaints. The last 20 miles when we were already past the Tarbat Ness lighthouse the wind turned to the SW and we had to turn the engine on. We waited a few hours at Cromarty for the tide to turn.

In the afternoon we arrived at Inverness Marina. We deserved a diner in a good Indian restaurant and then enjoyed live music at the Hootananny.

We are ahead of schedule, so the next day we took our time to visit the Culloden Battlefield and appreciated the good explanation in the visitor center.

The Calendonian Canal is only 50 miles and it took us 5 days because we wanted to enjoy the Highlands. At Fort Augustus a taxi took us in two hours to the starting point of the Glenn Affric Walk.



Glen Affric

The following days we took the countless lock complexes at a quiet pace and entertained us on the shore with a climb of the Ben Tee and, along with thousands of tourists, the Ben Nevis, an endless stone staircase with uneven steps.

Friday the last leg from Fort William to Dunstaffnage.

The ideal travel plan is completed. We had rain, periods of no wind and storms. But never to that extent for which we feared. A good preparation at home (with pilots!) at least one person on board who has good knowledge of meteorology, a good cook, the company of friends, a good boat and finally a bit of luck with the weather, made this holiday unforgettable.



Time
h:min

Distance
nm

Av Speed
knots

Week 1

Saturday	Dunstaffnage	Loch Aline	03:02	15,5	5,1
Sunday	Loch Aline	Tobermory	03:24	14,1	4,1
Monday	Tobermory	Castlebay	10:18	53,0	5,1
Tuesday	Castlebay	Eriskay	03:04	14,2	4,6
Wednesday	Eriskay	Loch Skipport	04:22	20,0	4,6
Thursday	Loch Skipport	Scalpay	07:07	41,3	5,8
Friday	Scalpay	Stornoway	07:07	34,0	4,8
			38:26	192,1	5,0

Week 2

Saturday	Stornoway	Lerwick	36:46	219,0	6,0
Tuesday	Lerwick	Fair Isle	07:06	41,3	5,8
Wednesday	Fair Isle	Kirkwall	11:22	62,1	5,8
			55:14	322,4	5,8

Week 3

Friday	Kirkwall	Inverness	27:39	133,0	4,8
Sunday	Inverness	Fort William	13:37	48,9	3,6
Friday	Fort William	Dunstaffnage	05:31	28,4	5,1
			46:37	210,3	4,5

Contact

Alba Sailing <http://www.alba-sailing.co.uk>

Andries Broersma andriesbroersma@hotmail.nl