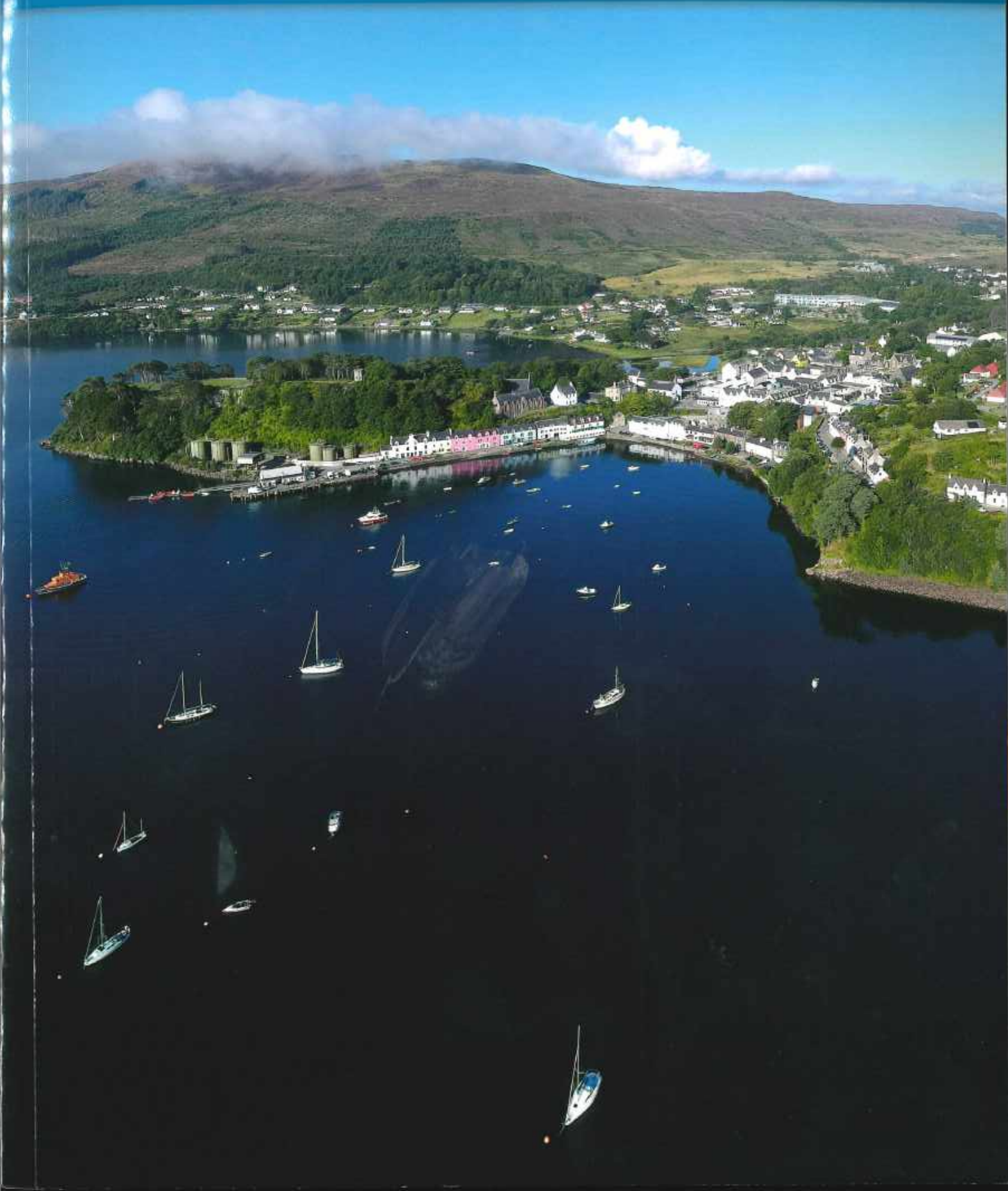
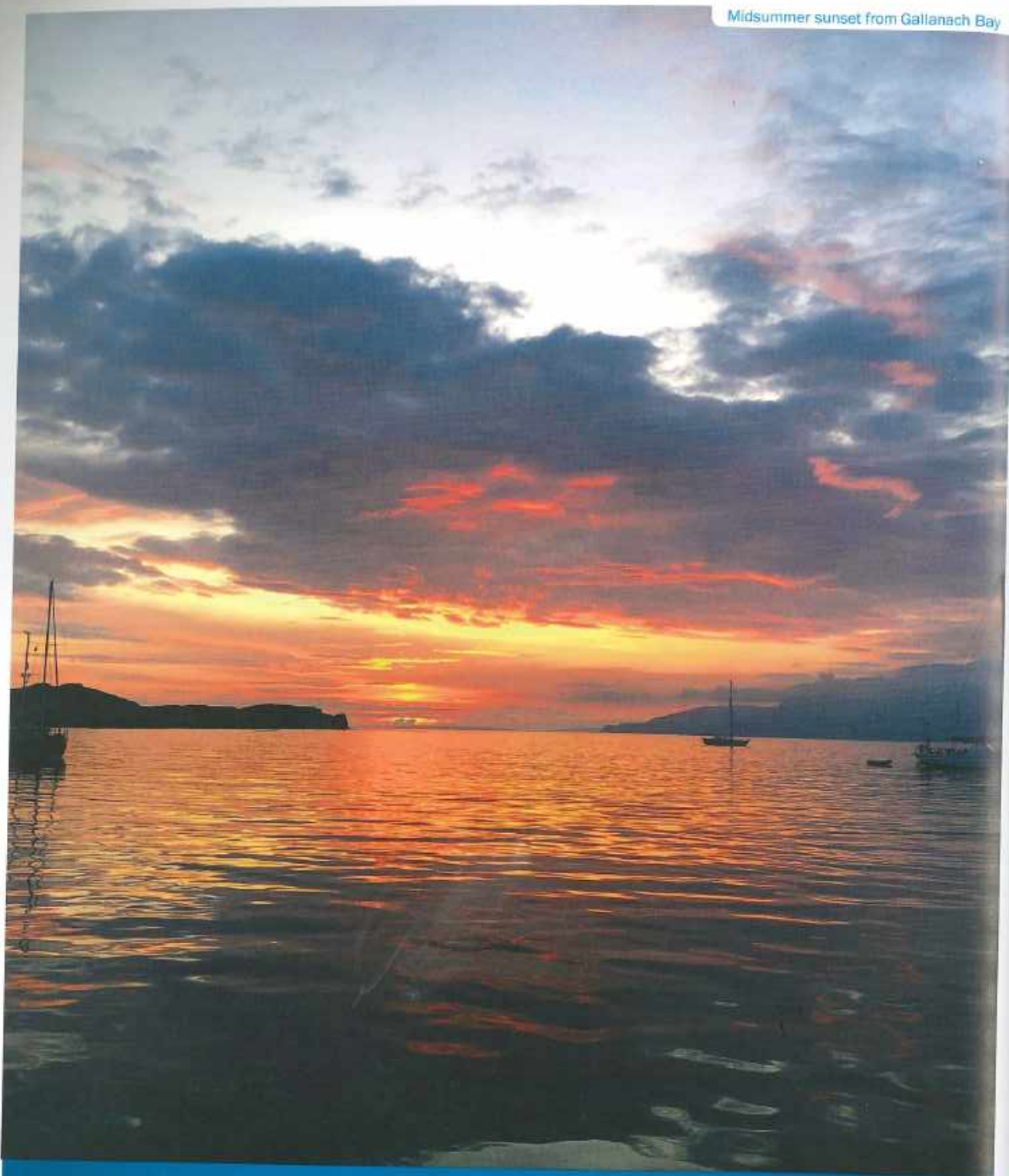




Clyde Cruising Club Annual 2024



Midsummer sunset from Gallanach Bay



Chartering on the West Coast with friends

Shadowfax of Ayr
Dufour 36 Classic

LOA 11.1m

Crew Christine Davidson, Michael Davidson, Corinne Spickett, Andrew Pitt

Dates 16 – 23 June 2023

Although we're mainly to be seen up at Bardowie these days, Michael and I started off in keel boats, sailing with a friend, sadly now long passed away, on his Sabre 27 *Tamarin* out of Rhu. Owning a boat is definitely on our radar for retirement but, meantime, we charter each June from the wonderful folk of Alba Sailing, based at Dunstaffnage Marina.

Our 2023 trip was one with a difference, however, as this time we had crew, in the shape of our good friends Andy and Corinne. They've been with us on a couple of Mediterranean flotilla holidays, and Andy did some dinghy sailing in his youth, but this was to be our first West Coast trip together.

As we packed an even bigger than usual mountain of gear onto the yacht – plus enough food and drink to provision a small army – early June's settled weather was just beginning to think about breaking.



Escaping the Loch Drumbuie midges

Dunstaffnage to Canna

We departed around 10:15 on a sunny Saturday morning in flat calm. After passing Glas Eileanan at the south end of the Sound of Mull we put the main up – more in hope than expectation, although there was some wind in the forecast. However, in the end, nothing came of it and so we motored all the way to Loch Drumbuie, where we anchored, thankfully at first attempt, in the south-west corner. The crew were keen to explore the lochside and rowed ashore in the dinghy. However, they soon encountered the vicious 'Loch Drumbuie midge' and beat a hasty retreat back to the yacht.

By Sunday morning there was a fair easterly blowing through the anchorage, so we headed out in the hope of a good sail. We were not disappointed. It was one of those rare days with a combination of sunshine, a good F4 wind and virtually no swell, so we had a fantastic passage to Canna.

The crew had fun steering, helping handle the sails, and comparing the view of mountains from the water with what they are used to as experienced hillwalkers and climbers. It was interesting for us to learn that, for example, 'that pointy one you can see from the Sound of Mull' is actually Beinn Talaidh and 'the one roughly behind Dunstaffnage with the two peaks' is the famous – due to the hydro-electric power station within – Ben Cruachan. We arrived in Canna Harbour late afternoon, just missing out on the last mooring.

A 'wet' day ashore

The forecast for later on Monday was F6, veering all the way round from the north-east to south-west, and rain. With a novice crew, we decided to have a day off, though quickly moved onto a recently-freed mooring for added peace of mind. By mid-morning it was overcast with light drizzle. However, undeterred, we went ashore and visited the old church, the chapel and the community shop, where we paid our mooring dues. Unfortunately Canna House was closed for refurbishment. Then we walked round the bay to Sanday and followed the bright orange 'To the Puffins' sign. After about two miles on a well-marked grassy path we spotted a large sea stack and were rewarded by the sight of lots of adult birds flying around and even a few 'pufflings' sitting on the ground.

By now it was raining heavily and so we got absolutely soaked, but it was worth it to see so many of these delightful birds. We'd planned to have a shower on the way back to the boat, as if we weren't wet enough already but discovered that the little block beside the farm had been demolished, along with the Old Dairy that used to contain a somewhat random, but still interesting, collection of island memorabilia. The farmer directed us up to the campsite, but the showers were very basic and with not much hot water.

We returned to *Shadowfax* for a few hours but were soon ashore again, rather better dressed this time, for dinner at Café Canna. The seafood platter was, as always, outstanding, featuring the freshest imaginable local crab, lobster and langoustines, served with salad, home-made bread, and aioli. By now the wind had definitely got up, and we were very glad that we'd put the outboard on the dinghy rather than trying to row back to the boat.



Seafood platter at Cafe Canna

Midsummer twilight in Gallanach Bay



Canna to Dunstaffnage

Tuesday dawned fair with a good southerly. Corinne was particularly keen to see seals and so we got the sails up and beat down the Sound of Rum for Gallanach Bay on Muck, where there are usually a fair number to be found. After carefully following the transit that took us safely between the reef, which at least was mostly visible since we entered close to low water, and the notorious Bo Haund, we dropped anchor on a sandy patch in 4m, then went ashore for a walk across the island to Port Mhor, returning with some of the lovely locally-made soap.

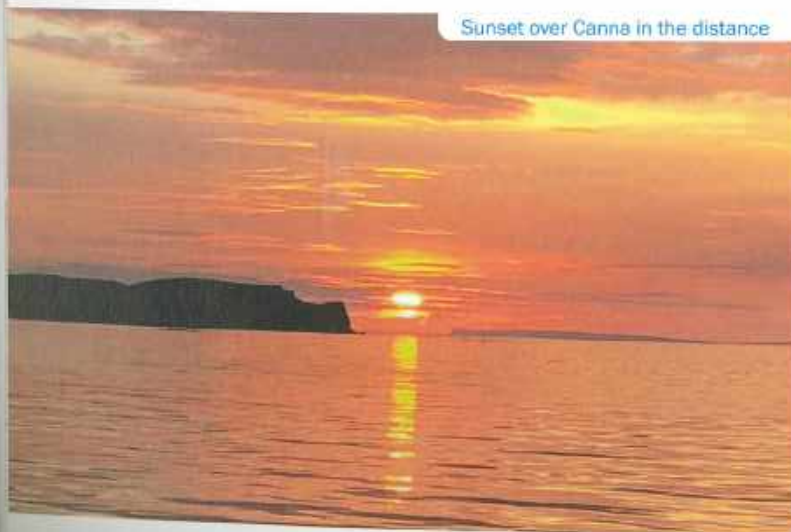
Back at the bay, the crew went for a swim and – to their delight – several curious seals soon turned up to see what was going on. To celebrate the close encounter, for dinner we had ‘seals on rocks’ – sausage seals – balanced on mash – rocks – surrounded by a thick onion gravy that green cabbage had been added to for the last few minutes of cooking, representing seaweed. The day ended with a glorious Midsummer’s Eve sunset, the sun disappearing just behind the west end of Canna.

Wednesday saw another fine sailing breeze, this time F3-F5 from the west. However, after a few breezy days, the typical West Coast swell had returned. It was fairly choppy rounding Horse Island into the waves, and we rolled a fair bit once we turned south towards Ardnamurchan Point. Although this is perfectly usual for the West Coast, it was new to the crew, who had so far experienced remarkably flat conditions. Sadly some seasickness resulted. However they coped well, and we arrived at Tobermory in good spirits, picking up one of the THA moorings before going ashore for showers and shopping.

Since we couldn’t decide whether to pay the traditional visit to the Mishnish for a pint or sample the Isle of Mull ice cream, we ended up doing both. We were on holiday after all. In the evening we were surrounded by an amazing number of moon jellyfish, presumably swept into the bay on the tide.

On Thursday we headed back to base as Andy and Corinne had to get home to Birmingham by the weekend. Unfortunately there was very little breeze and so we were using the engine most of the way.

Sunset over Canna in the distance



However, they did get to sail the last few miles across the Firth of Lorne, tacking between Lady Rock and Lismore. We berthed up at Dunstaffnage where all agreed it had been a great week, with stunning scenery, excellent sailing and – quite importantly – no major fallings-out. Whilst the crew packed, we made a lightning raid on the supermarket in Oban to stock up on fresh provisions.

The crew depart and the weather turns

On Friday morning the weather had definitely changed for the worse. After saying a sad farewell to our friends, Michael and I set off on our own, in full wet-weather gear, with a strong southerly breeze behind us, towards Lismore Light – not that we could see it in the mist. Visibility soon improved, but we decided to make it a short day and motored into Loch Aline where we found some shelter tucked in the north-east corner, taking care to anchor well clear of the many private moorings at the head of the loch. We spent the rest of the day resting, reading, and listening to heavy rain bouncing off the coach roof.

Saturday's forecast was southerly F4-5 increasing F5-7, perhaps 8, later. So finding some good shelter for the night was a priority. We considered going back to Loch Drumbuie, which is always a good option, but in the end decided on Tobermory because there are more onshore options for things to do – excellent walks along the shore to Aros Park or round the headland to Rubha nan Gall, for example – if the wind was to stay up.

When we arrived around noon the sun was shining but the wind was gusting and almost all the moorings were already occupied. So we quickly picked up one of the last



Christine meets the Tobermory Cat

free ones and secured ourselves onto it with a main line and a back-up. As usual, we were amazed to note that some boats had just brought the float aboard and tied the pick-up line round a bow cleat – although they were still there in the morning and so I guess it was ok – this time. By 19:00 the wind had increased noticeably and by 21:00 there was a proper blow coming through the harbour. It wasn't the quietest of nights, with the boat rolling, waves sloshing, and lines creaking, but we were safely held.

The wind stayed strong well into Sunday afternoon, but it had veered a little to the west and so we had more protection. The sun was shining again, and we took the dinghy to the pontoons and had showers, did some shopping – including Tobermory Chocolate and Tobermory Gin – and had a nice walk.

Whilst on land we were lucky enough to encounter the famous Tobermory Cat. We suspect this is possibly about the third generation thereof and that – in typical celebrity style – he has a team of stand-ins for when he's not



Lismore Light and a grey sea

Contrasting weather either side of the mast off Mull



On a Tobermory mooring

around. However, Tobermory is obviously blessed with a good supply of big friendly ginger cats who are remarkably placid in the face of attention from strangers.

On the way back to the boat we took a short detour to visit the colony of nesting cormorants where we spotted lots of chicks. Today was our 35th wedding anniversary and it wasn't the first wedding anniversary we have spent on a mooring in Tobermory Harbour, so we treated ourselves to a nice steak dinner and a good bottle of red wine aboard.

The rule of thumb

With the weather improving, and four days before we had to hand *Shadowfax* back, we planned to sail anticlockwise round Mull. However, there was a problem. Michael's thumb had been a little bit swollen all trip, and now it was getting considerably worse – a spreading angry red, purple, hot to the touch, and quite painful. It was clearly infected.

Whilst we're used to sailing short-handed, I really didn't fancy the possibility of having to sail single-handed. So we decided discretion was the better part of valour, dropped the mooring around 08:30 on Monday morning, motored down the Sound of Mull, were berthed in Dunstaffnage Marina by 14:00, and at the surgery/pharmacist in Connel soon after. Michael was prescribed antibiotics and told to 'bathe it in water as hot as you can bear' which did gradually help.

The rest of the trip was spent fairly close to base visiting favourite spots. Tuesday was grey and misty – lots of CalMac ferries looming out of the murk as we passed the north entrance to Oban Bay – but there was a good wind. So we beat down past Kerrera and then had a quiet night at anchor in Puilladobhain in the rain.

On Wednesday we decided to go and have a look at the Garvellachs and again had a good sail as the weather gradually improved. At one point everything to the port side was in brilliant sunshine, whilst Mull and everything to starboard was under grey cloud and mist. It was quite weird – like someone had photoshopped two totally different images together. We spent the night in Loch Spelve. Our preference is the south-west corner by Kinlochspelve, which is a fine spot that seems to be less visited than the other anchorages. It must have been shearing time because a group of shepherds with dogs were collecting all the sheep down off the hills.

Thursday was the final day of our charter and, again, we tried to sail as much as we could, this time past Craignure and then up the west side of Lismore. Unfortunately the wind was not very cooperative. It would die entirely for a while, then suddenly gust up to 22 knots for about 20 minutes, then die again. At least it was dry.

By 15:00 the squalls were getting more frequent and so we decided, very sadly, that it was time to bring our West Coast adventure to an end for another year. After fuelling *Shadowfax* and putting her on her home berth, we had dinner at the recently re-opened Wide Mouthed Frog. The food was very good indeed and it's great to see it back in business under new owners.



Evening in Loch Spelve

Thoughts from the crew

We asked Andy and Corinne what they'd thought of their first experience of West Coast sailing. They said:

- Our favourite on-shore experience was Café Canna and the little shop next door, which had a great range of items considering its size.
- It was really special to see the view from the sea which we have visited previously from the land, for example Sanna Bay. It gives a whole different perspective of the coastline.
- We loved the sense of space combined with the excitement of islands appearing and their topography apparently changing as we sailed past or round them.
- The view of the sunset from Gallanach Bay almost on the Solstice was wonderful. On the other hand it was light so late that we didn't really see the stars, which would have been fabulous.
- The traditional end-of-sailing-day G&T and snacks were a definite highlight.
- We appreciated the one-pot cooking in a small yacht galley and particularly enjoyed 'seals on rocks', especially as we had been swimming with seals earlier that day.

And would they come again? Well, they are already discussing the idea of Michael and I chartering a bigger boat so we can bring more friends along next time. So I think we can safely say that is a – yes. 🇬🇧

Christine Davidson