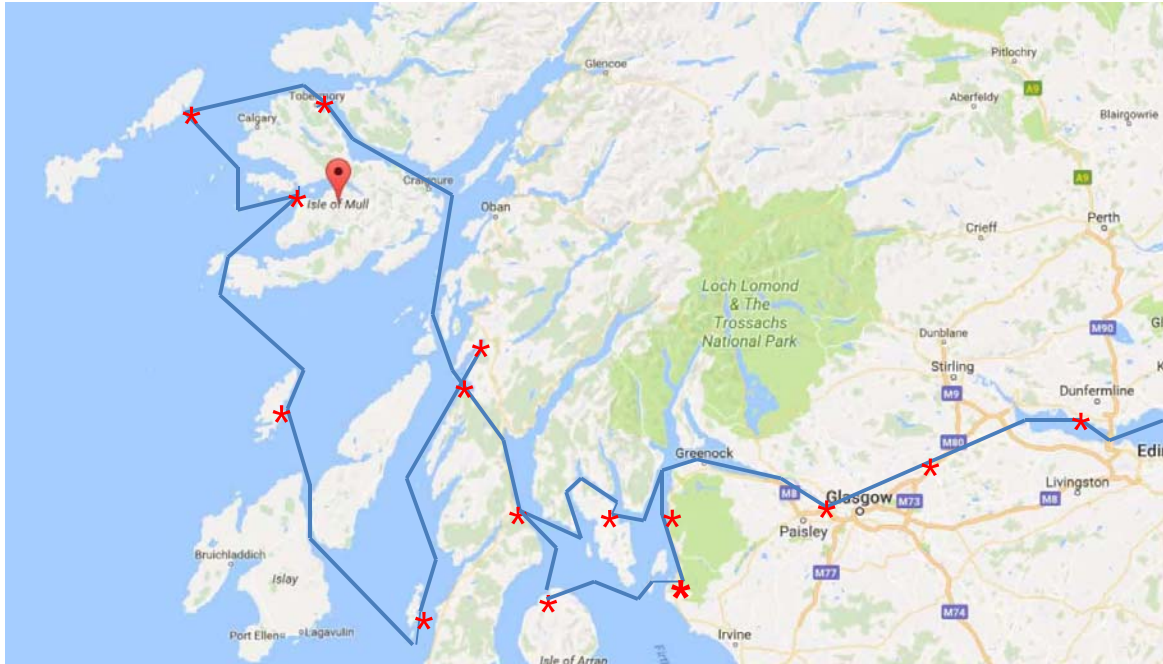


Wildcat Heads West 2017



Thursday 22nd June, Capernaum to Kelpies – 10NM

We set off at 11:20 and motored up river, arriving 2 hours later. Our mast was lowered and stowed in an hour, however a boat from Port Edgar, which arrived shortly afterwards and which we were to travel with to the Kelpies didn't have a clue and it took David 3 hours to help them get theirs down. We followed them up the new cut and into the Kelpies lock where they hit the lock wall; we were glad to be told that we were not going to be transiting with them the following day.



Saturday 24th June - Kelpies to Auchinstarry – 14NM

Rather than transit through to Kirkintilloch we decided to stop at Auchinstarry Marina where there was a festival to celebrate the life of Chris Odell, who had worked at the marina for 14 years. It was a great evening with bands, art activities, food etc. The canal was clear of weed and there were no depth problems – the maintenance work carried out over the winter had clearly helped. Tegan controlled the stern line on all 20 locks, only dropping it in the water once – better than any other hand!

Sunday 25th June - Auchinstarry to Southbank Marina – 6NM

Unfortunately overnighthing in Auchinstarry meant that we could not get through the Twechar bridge until after 9 am and this meant that we would be too late to transit through to Bowling. We therefore arranged to leave Wildcat in Southbank marina for a week, which is now allowed in the 10 day transit license.

Saturday 1st July - Southbank to Bowling – 15NM

We set off at 7:30 in sunshine in order to make the first bridge at 9. Tegan threw the stern line again whilst David spent the entire 9 hours hand sewing a patch on the ancient UV'd sprayhood. The sun started to disappear in the early afternoon and it was decidedly chilly when we stopped for fish and chips from the canal side boat at Clydebank. There was more weed from there until Bowling but we managed to get



through without resorting to the outboard. We had bought duck eggs en-route once more from the old lock keepers cottage so had egg baps for tea.

Sunday 2nd July - Bowling

Lazy day in. High water was too early to leave in the morning and we had arranged to eat dinner at the Two Fat Ladies in the City restaurant with extended family from America that evening. The food was fabulous and the early set menu a complete bargain if you are ever over there – but you need to book.

3rd July - Bowling to Port Bannatyne – 25NM

We left at 9:15 to head for Port Bannatyne. The first section down to Cloch Point was lumpy with a short chop due to a brisk wind over tide, but then settled down. We ate dinner in the Port Inn and stayed to watch live music; a great evening.

4th July Port Bannatyne to East Loch Tarbert, 22 NM

Lazy start and unusually managed to sail all the way around the Kyles in cold hazy weather accompanied by the first of many porpoises. Provisioned and then went to bed early in preparation for the Crinan Canal the next day.

5th July – East Loch Tarbert to Crinan – 18 NM

We left at 6am to be up at the canal in time for opening. The sun rise was beautiful with layers of scenery unfolding. The troublesome boat from Port Edgar was sitting in the basin at Ardrishaig, so they had clearly managed to get their mast back up



successfully. We transited through with a Norwegian man who was single handing a large aluminium boat. Fortunately he had paid for assisted passage. David worked well with assisted passage man Hugh operating the locks whilst Tegan and Kathy did the ropes. We made it through in record time and squeezed into a tiny gap in the corner of the basin, next to a UFO 27 with 5 aboard including 3 kids. Wandered up to the boat yard where Vic 27, an old puffer, was hauled up on the slip having a gaping hole in her bottom re-plated.

6th July – Crinan to Tobermory – 43NM

We set off in the morning with the intention of sailing to Kerrera. Slack water at the Dorus Mor was at 10:15, so we set off an 30 minutes earlier, having filled up with fuel on the wobbly pontoon at the boat yard. The weather was drizzly but with not much wind and we made good progress, so south of Kerrera we changed our plans and headed for Tobermory; a day earlier than planned. The wind was variable on the way up the Sound of Mull, ranging from nothing to flying along closed hauled. We passed another Sabre on the way up but they were heading in the opposite direction and all we could do was wave as we passed. The weather was getting lumpy by the time we arrived as bad weather was approaching.

7th July – Tobermory

Tegan's 15th Birthday! Lazy brunch followed by a walk around the bay. A cruise liner swung at anchor. In contrast Swn y Mor, a beautiful old Watson Class Lifeboat, built 1935, entered and dropped her hook by the pier near Calve Island. Had a birthday tea at the Tobermory Hotel and then were serenaded to sleep by drunken singing and the huge speakers on a nearby pocket yacht. Not our idea of Hebridean



charm and very different from the last time we were in Tobermory 12 years previously. Whilst the cruise liners may bring additional money to the islands they seem to have a detrimental effect on the area and don't appear to be welcomed by the locals, something we had also witnessed in Orkney a few years previously.

8th July – Tobermory to Coll, 21 Nm

Awoke around 5 with sore stomachs only to find that the harbour facilities didn't open until 7, despite needing a code to get in. We had planned to stay a day longer but the disturbed night's sleep meant that we were keen to move on and left at 5.30. The wind was a F3 on the nose and increased through the passage, so we motor sailed. It was exciting to see past Ardnamurchan for the first time and the Small Isles appeared to be not far away. It was probably a good job that we didn't have a chart for further north as I think we would have otherwise turned our stern to the wind and headed north rather than

west (that will have to wait for retirement). The sea was quite lumpy by the time that we arrived In Coll at 9.30 and the other boats already on the moorings were keen to hear what the conditions were like out to sea as they one by one departed. It was an ominous sign.



We ate lunch at the Coll Hotel and as we sat on their deck, where 2 weeks earlier the Bullions had sat in glorious sunshine, the wind had picked up to F6 and the drizzle arrived. Looking out into the bay at Wildcat swinging on her mooring it became obvious why other boats were leaving as we arrived. The wind had now shifted further west, and she now sat side on to the waves that continued to roll straight into the bay, and was rolling badly. We retired to her, had a brief tea and went to bed trying to hold on to something and avoid feeling sick ALL NIGHT!

9th July - Coll to Sound of Ulva, 24 NM

After the disappointment of Tobermory and a sleepless night on Coll we were keen for a pontoon (for easy access for the girls and Stumpy) and some shelter. The new pontoons at Ulva Ferry allowed us to head south west around Mull and see Staffa and Fingal's cave on the way. We set off in



light rain with the sky clearing behind, hoping that some sunshine would catch us up. Unfortunately it never quite did. We passed the upper end of the Treshnish Isles where Puffins, Guillemots and many other sea birds were abundant and then on to find Fingal's cave. Here the trip boats were in so we made do with getting as close as we could on Wildcat.

Ulva ferry is a beautifully wild place with Ben More rising majestically in the back ground to the south and a stunning sunset down the Sound. The approach can be slightly tricky due to an unmarked rock just below the surface and the tide flows strongly south on the ebb (more of that later) but it is worth it. We watched an otter playing on a small island in the Sound as we headed for the pontoon. We arrived around 3.30pm and took the tender across to the Boathouse Café on Ulva and then had a short walk. Back on the boat we were preparing dinner when a young girl of probably no more than 5, called Lucy, on a boat from Carrickfergus, came over and asked if we would like some fish that she had caught with her Dad. She gave us 2 Coley and then happily gutted and beheaded them for us whilst Tegan and Kalie looked

on in surprise and awe. In the evening Tegan had a go at using the tender with outboard whilst David and Kathy paddled the blow up canoe. We tried to reach Eas Fors, a spectacular waterfall which cascaded down a cliff onto the beach on the other side of the bay to the north of the Sound but the lateness of the evening and the strong south going tide made us turn around before we reached there.

10th July – Ulva Ferry

The sun was warm and after several long days and early starts we were in no mood for another day at sea so we walked along to coast road to the waterfall, where we had a picnic lunch and then onwards to Lip na Cloich a gorgeous sub-tropical garden.

11th July – Ulva Ferry to Colonsay, 36 NM

We had planned to leave at slack but were slightly late leaving. Within minutes the flow had increased from nothing to several knots. Ordinarily that would be fine but Wildcat has a tendency to veer to Port in reverse and we were surrounded by large expensive boats. As we reversed out we were spun round and T boned onto the end of the pontoon. No amount of pushing would get us off however eventually with the engine on full power we managed to free ourselves and miss the other boats but left a large black rubber mark down the topsides.

The sun was shining and we motored along the north coast of the Ross of Mull and then down through the Sound of Iona past the Abbey. The beaches at the north end of the island look stunning but we didn't have time to stop. At the south end of the Sound the wind arrived and we were able to sail out through the rocky channel and most of the way to Colonsay before it died away once again. There are no moorings on Colonsay and just a single spot at the inner end of the ferry pier to tie alongside. We rafted alongside another boat initially and then they left to head through the sound of Islay, our route for the following day. In the evening we climbed up to the monument on the hill to the south of the harbour and saw lots of boats anchored in the bay beyond. The island was beautiful.

12th July - Colonsay to Gigha, 36 NM

Another stunning morning, we set off at 8am to arrive at the top of the Islay Sound at slack water



as the tidal flow in the sound can get quite fierce. The views of Islay and the Paps of Jura were stunning. Even at slack water we had 5 knots plus of tide with us, so we throttled right back to have time to enjoy the view and watch an oligarch's James Bond type boat using tonnes of diesel as it pushed against the tide in the other direction – it's tender was larger than us! We had originally intended to stay in Craighouse on Jura, but it seemed a shame to stop on such a stunning day and Gigha beckoned across a sparkling sea. The pontoon and moorings were packed with boats heading back to Northern Island before bad weather arrived. We managed to sneak a space on the pontoon – 27ft is a small boat in these parts nowadays – and were lucky enough to be able to move later when we realised that Gigha seems to have its own tide time table which is different to anywhere else (multiple HW/LWs) and we would have dried out over night. Gigha was stunning and reminded us of the Isles of Scilly; warm sunshine and golden sandy beaches.

13th July – Gigha to Ardfarn, 33NM

In the morning we walked to Achamore gardens while we waited for the tide to turn north. We had visited here 15 years ago around the time of the community buy-out but they seemed rather neglected now. The tides up the sound of Jura were strong and required careful navigation around the islands North of Loch Sween where it was at times a struggle to keep off the rocks. We passed Dorus Mor just as the rain started and it was pouring by the time we arrived. Walking and laundering was the order of the day for a bit.



17th July – Ardfarn to East Loch Tarbert – 24NM

We entered the canal early and were soon amongst a huddle of boats at the first manual lock. Fortunately all bar one were heading north. Unfortunately it looked like we would be transiting with the grumpy AWB, who had paid for assisted passage and felt that we should not be sharing it. The assistance turned out to be Hugh again and he was very happy for our assistance. At the top pound before heading down hill we had to wait for the Cairnbaan swing bridge to open and our grumpy companion managed to drift to the side and get a mud bank between his keel and skeg – well and truly stuck. Our initial offers to pull him off were declined and we were told we must fetch Scottish Canals to get him out. We declined and he eventually accepted a rope from Kathy who towed him off with tiny Wildcat's wee engine without thanks whilst I watched from the canal bank. Kalie threw the rope back at him in disgust. We got our own back later when he went below whilst locking down and ended up suspended by his stern line which he had to cut before slamming several feet down into the rapidly disappearing water. Karma!

18th July – East Loch Tarbert to Lochranza – 11NM

We stocked up on fish from the back street fish shop and then headed out after lunch into a stunning summer day; warm sunshine and clear blue skies and enough wind to sail. We picked up a mooring then enjoyed a cold swim and a barbeque on the pushpit.



19th July – Lochranza to Largs – 20NM

We were buffeted by strong katabatic winds howling down of Goat Fell. As it eased off to a F5/6 we headed out with 2 reefs in the main; then shook them out as we headed around the north of Arran. The lull didn't last long and we were soon buffet by strong winds and a very lumpy sea with plenty of green ones over the deck all the way to Largs. Probably the worst 5 hours of sailing we have ever had. We arrived in Largs cold, wet and exhausted to find the circus was in town. Wanting to escape the boat and without time to cook a hot meal we feasted on satsumas and oat cakes followed by large chocolate waffles as still in our oilies we drip dried in the Big Top trying to avoid being picked from the audience!

Return home (Kip, Bowling, Kelpies and Aberdour) – 9+17+35+18=79NM

A week after we had entered the Forth and Clyde canal heading west the cill in lock 9 had washed out and the canal had been closed. It was now still closed several weeks later and wasn't due to re-open until the day we returned to work, so after a couple of nights in Kip, while Kathy packed the kids off to scout camp and I carried out some running repairs we returned to Bowling to leave the boat for 7 weeks as we had no more spare weekends. When we returned in early September the weed was terrible as the weed cutter which had so improved things on the way out had broken down. This resulted in a difficult return leg to Southbank, including a blocked water intake which I tried to clear with a swim and Kathy eventually managed to clear by blowing down the intake pipe.

We arrived back on our mooring in Aberdour on 10th September having travelled 437 miles on our 3 week summer break; Wildcat having been away from her mooring for 12 weeks. Yet another amazing adventure in our beautiful country. We shall be setting forth again.....