

## "UNFINISHED BUSINESS"

### THE 2017 CRUISE OF BAGHEERA OF WHITBY



Every other year, I stretch the legs of Bagheera with something a bit more demanding than a trip to Brittany. While thinking about what to do in 2017, it occurred to me that I had covered the entire coastline of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland (well, excluding Orkney and Shetland) except for the stretch from Ramsgate to Inverness. It seemed as though the time had come to close the loop; the small problem was that to do this, we had to either leave Bagheera somewhere in Scotland or alternatively complete a circumnavigation in one throw. After some thought, I decided on the latter, with all the challenges entailed. As I thought about it, more intermediate objectives presented themselves:

- Going up the Thames to London and mooring in St. Katharine Docks;
- Making a pilgrimage to Arthur Ransome's Secret Water territory on the East coast;
- Taking Bagheera to Whitby, her original port of registration;
- Going up the Tyne to Newcastle, my home town;
- Calling on my Best Man who lives near Amble;
- Visiting Peterhead, where I spent 5 years building a major power station;
- Going up the Mersey to Liverpool (only because I had never spoken to anybody who had done it!);

Planning started before Christmas 2016 and the journey was divided into 4 main legs - Dartmouth to London, London to Inverness, the transit of the Caledonian Canal and Fort William to

Dartmouth. With enough crew coming forward to cover the whole trip, it was game on! It then became a scramble to assemble all the charts and pilot books necessary (many thanks to Tim and Anne Bizzey for the loan of their collection) and to get Bagheera ready for the trip.

## **LEG 1 - DARTMOUTH TO LONDON**

### **Sunday 14th May 2017**

It was a lovely day in Dartmouth as the advance party arrived (Nigel and Sheila Hayler, Diana and the Skipper) and the mountain of stores was soon stowed. After lunch, Sheila and Diana left just as Mike Wrigley and Don Walker arrived by bus from Totnes. Looking at the forecast, we had a good but short window of fine weather which would take us across Lyme Bay and so after the usual safety briefing, we prepared to set sail. Then disaster struck - we discovered that the bow navigation light, which had been fine, was no longer working. Feverish investigation failed to track down the fault; we had power at the terminals but the bulb failed to light, the suspect being the three-way selector switch. Crossing Lyme Bay at night without proper navigation lights was clearly not an option and so we settled down to a fine supper of Pippa Wrigley's stuffed aubergines as the weather steadily deteriorated outside.

### **Monday 15th May 2017 - Dartmouth to Weymouth**

The Skipper was ashore early in the morning in the rain to seek out emergency navigation lights but none could be found and instead, the bow lights were wired temporarily to a light switch in the forecabin - a bit Heath Robinson but we had a working bow light and were legal! The rain had pretty well stopped as at 1130, we left Kingswear and zeroed the log at the Checkstone, filing a passage report with the coastguard with an intended destination of Swanage - the cruise had started!

By the Eastern Blackstone, we were sailing with a light southerly breeze which filled in as the morning went on and was Force 4/5 for most of the day. As a consequence, we raced across Start Bay, reeling off 37.7 miles in the first 6 hours after casting off - cracking stuff. However, we now had to face a foul tide round Portland Bill - we had decided not to take the inside passage as the tide wasn't right. By 2000 the wind started to fail and it was engine on as we rounded the East Shambles buoy and headed up to Weymouth, where we arrived alongside the pontoon at 2130 just as darkness fell.

Two crew were immediately despatched ashore for fish and chips while the others tidied the boat; although only medium portions had been bought, they were enormous and there was enough left over for another meal! We all slept well.

Day's run 60.6nm, Engine hours 3.0.

### **Tuesday 16th May 2017 - Weymouth to Newtown Creek**

After being struck a smart blow by a departing yacht, fortunately on our anchor (no apology was forthcoming) we left Weymouth at 1020 to find the southerly wind still holding but today at Force 3/4, giving a very peaceful and dry sail along the Dorset coast. Nigel became all dewy-eyed as we passed Durdle Door - some romantic reminiscences had overwhelmed him! St. Alban's Head and Anvil Point came and went and by mid-afternoon we were pottering across Christchurch Bay in a failing breeze. By 1540, it was engine on as we worked our way across to the north passage through the Needles Channel and stemmed the strong tide round Hurst Castle - it seemed to take forever to get clear but there was plenty to see. The breeze came and went but then died completely and rain started. We settled on Newtown Creek for the night and picked up a buoy

there at 1910; it was almost deserted, only half-a-dozen boats in and rows of empty moorings - quite unlike a summer weekend!

Chicken casserole for supper as the rain drummed on the coachroof.

Day's run 44.8nm, engine hours 2.4.

### **Wednesday 17th May 2017 - Newtown Creek to Eastbourne**

After a night of very heavy rain, we woke to no wind at all and the sound of St. Catherine's Point foghorn bleating away in the distance. Still, the rain had stopped and we had a fair tide for our run down the Solent and as we passed Cowes, Nigel made his obligatory obeisance to the Royal Yacht Squadron. Crossing Osborne Bay, we saw an extraordinary vessel coming towards us which turned out to be a freighter with a perhaps a dozen yachts as deck cargo - a bizarre sight. By 0930 we were off Egypt Point with a heavy blanket of fog lying over Southampton Water but fortunately, we were in clear air. 1100 found us at No Man's Land Fort as we motored on with the rain now falling once again but by Selsey Bill we had the unexpected bonus of some weak and watery sunshine. At 1430 with 12 miles to run to Beachy Head, we caught sight of the Rampion Wind Farm, the first of many we were to pass on the cruise.

The sunshine was short-lived though and soon after Brighton, having decided to press on to Eastbourne, the rain started again in earnest. We passed Beachy Head light close in but the rain and poor visibility made it difficult to capture the impressiveness of this great chalk headland.

Eventually we arrived in Sovereign Harbour at 1845, absolutely soaked through, successfully managing our first lock of the cruise and mooring up in the bleak and characterless surroundings of the marina. Although the facilities were fine, it does rather give the impression of a property development with water attached rather than a proper harbour! In spite of the continuing rain, the crew voted to eat ashore and rather disconsolately, we dripped our way off to the Thai restaurant where we had a surprisingly excellent meal followed of course by a peaceful night's sleep.

Day's run 63.8nm, engine hours 11.1 - motored all day!

### **Thursday 18th May 2017 - Eastbourne to Ramsgate**

Morning saw the crew ashore for hot showers (the Skipper preferring to shower aboard, which gave the opportunity to wash down the heads) and it was 0830 when we entered the lock. Once outside, it was clear that although the rain had ceased, there was no wind again and we settled down to a long day of motoring. At least the coastline was rather more interesting; the first notable place passed was, believe it or not, Bexhill-on-Sea - cue for a song from Nigel about the Caithness Self-Lift Chair! For those of you who don't know it, get a copy of Richard Stilgoe and Peter Skellern's farewell concert, "A Quiet Night In" - it's hilarious.

Then it was Hastings, with its old tarred sheds and fishing boats hauled up on the beach, Dungeness with its defunct power stations and Dover where after reporting our passage to Dover VTS we dodged the ferries entering and leaving the harbour. We thought about stopping there for the night but decided to press on to Ramsgate; as we did so, the wind came up, right on the nose of course, and the rain started to come down in sheets so it was an easy decision to keep motoring to get there as soon as possible. By the time we arrived off Ramsgate and reported in to the Port VTS, we were thoroughly wet through once again but once moored up at 1845, it was out with the malt whisky and on with the heater to restore spirits....

Day's run 56.6nm, engine hours 10.4 - using lots of fuel!

### **Friday 19th May 2017 - Ramsgate to Queenborough**

The morning saw an expedition ashore for stores and to explore Ramsgate, an interesting town if rather run-down. Currently, it is seeing an upsurge in harbour traffic with the rash of wind farms being constructed along the Channel, with several wind-farm support ships based there. There were several historic vessels in the harbour, including an interesting ex-US Navy Rhine Patrol Boat and it would have been good to stay another day - but we had to press on.

At 1100 we left Ramsgate under a threatening sky and found a light westerly breeze outside, giving a welcome respite from motoring. The coastline was interesting all the way to North Foreland, with some fine houses up on the chalky cliffs, another sign of Ramsgate's past importance. Sadly at this point the wind deserted us and we motored round the corner into the vast width of the lower Thames estuary. At first we could see nothing of the North shore but as the sun came out and we passed past Margate and Whitstable, things gradually took shape - first the wind farms, next the old anti-aircraft towers and then the outline of the Essex coast. Navigation was interesting up the South Channel and all the way from North Foreland, the depth rarely exceeded 6-8 metres and it was with relief that we picked off the buoys one by one - SE Margate, S. Margate, Reculver, Copperas and Spile before we turned into the Medway, passing close by the wreck of the SS Montgomery, still loaded with her cargo of 1000 tonnes of TNT and surrounded by an array of warning buoys.

Once past Sheerness Port, strangely deserted, we turned into the Swale and berthed alongside the pontoon at Queenborough, just downstream from a very old Dutch smack and by contrast, a brand-new steel barge built in Stoke-on-Trent, owned by an American lady. It turned out that she had bought it with no boating experience and was taking it with friends and a professional skipper (who turned out to be the father of the builder) across the Channel and into the canals of France where she intended to spend the winter. It was deeply luxurious, although rather surprisingly for a boat of some 25 metres in length with only one sleeping cabin. All the gear was clearly of the highest standard and it was intriguing to compare an inland waterways barge with an ocean-going yacht.

Queenborough was an interesting place, with a mixture of Georgian terraces and old Merchant houses mixed with 20th-century tat! Clearly drink is an important leisure activity for its residents, with no less than four pubs and the Yacht Club along its short high street. The best though was yet to come; we turned off the high street and found a creek running along the back, full of vessels of all kinds, including a retired naval fast patrol boat as well as fishing boats of all shapes and sizes, yachts, motor cruisers and dinghies. The big surprise was turning the corner at the end of the creek and finding the Admiral's Arm, a delightful micro pub in an old stable which served no food but excellent beer in a great atmosphere. Altogether, Queenborough was very enjoyable and hospitable. Thunderclouds in the sunset provided some remarkable pictures but promised heavy showers for the next day.

Day's run 30.9nm, engine hours 5.6

### **Saturday 20th May 2017 - Queenborough to St. Katharine Docks**

At last we woke to sunshine! The Skipper went ashore for a Times paper while Popeye prepared bacon and egg sandwiches. There was no rush to leave early as the tide would not be right to enter St. Katharine Docks until the evening and so it was not until 1120 that we cast off from the pontoon, Bagheera springing out astern immaculately. The breeze was a brisk WSW 4/5 and we sailed along comfortably at 5-6 knots under yankee alone, watching the rain clouds forming up

and wondering which ones would find us - as indeed some did! One minute we would be in bright sunshine, the next in torrential rain. There were lots to see and Mike Wrigley's sister and husband could observe our passage from their home across the estuary in Southend.

The instructions in the Port of London Authority Leisure Users Guide were easy to follow and we reached up the estuary in the inshore passage south of the main channel, ticking off the buoys as we went. Ships passed up and down and even a few yachts were seen. It was good to see the London Gateway Port busy and soon after at the West Blyth buoy we called Thames VTS and received permission to cross over to the starboard side of the channel. Gravesend proved interesting with its large Hindu temple and fine waterside houses and Tilbury brought the London Cruise Terminal complete with cruise liner and so there was plenty to keep us interested. St. Clements' Reach provided another milestone (and a photo opportunity for the Skipper) before we shot the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge at Dartford. At Crayfordness, we called Thames VTS again for permission to enter the stretch of river that includes the Thames Barrier, passing the Barking Creek Barrier and the Woolwich Ferry before going through the Barrier itself - excitement all round! Although the channel through which we were directed seemed narrow, Nigel reminded us that it would take an aircraft carrier..... Past the Emirates Cable Car, the O2 Arena and the Skipper's old haunts at Greenwich where he used to live in an old Georgian house on the Ballast Quay, the Naval College and of course an amazing amount of development of any site with river frontage, there was plenty to keep us engaged. Then round the corner at Cherry Garden Pier we came and straight ahead of us was Tower Bridge - quite a moment and what a trip, exceeding all expectations.

At 1840 we picked up a waiting buoy outside St. Katharine Docks and settled down to wait to enter the entrance lock. Initially we were told that we would not have long to wait but then it became apparent that we were waiting for a Thames Sailing Barge, the Gladys, which appeared round the corner at about 1915. It was fascinating and a little chastening to see how two people handled such a large craft with its low manoeuvrability with so little fuss. Soon we were following them into the lock and by 2000 we were moored comfortably in East Dock, alongside a very friendly world-girdling couple on their Amel Super Maramu. Don escaped soon after arriving and Mike, Nigel and the Skipper, after perusing all the restaurants in St. Katharine's, ate well at Dokke which called itself a Fusion restaurant - very different but tasty food and it was new and so as yet undiscovered. Although it was Saturday night and the area round the Central and West Docks was buzzing, the East Dock was blessedly peaceful and we all slept well.

Day's run 38.1nm, engine hours 6.8.

### **Sunday 21st May 2017 - St. Katharine Docks**

The morning was spent cleaning and tidying the boat in preparation for the next leg and one by one the crew departed - Nigel to Peckham to catch a lift home and Mike to catch a train back to Bath. At about 1130, the Skipper's son Alastair with daughters Elsa and Niamh arrived to visit and we had an excellent lunch in St. Katharine Docks at Zizzi, one of the better chain restaurants, we thought. Finally the Skipper, by tradition the last to leave the ship (!), left to catch a train to Crewkerne (just) and home.

It had been a mixed week with some poor weather and unhelpful winds but also some fascinating places and coastline and of course the trip up the Thames to cap it all off. Leg 1 was completed and Cruise Objective No. 1 achieved!

**Leg 1 cruise distance 294.7nm, engine hours 39.3**

## LEG 2A - LONDON TO NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

### **Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th May 2017 - St. Katharine Docks**

The Skipper travelled back on Saturday morning to prepare for the next leg and the afternoon was spent doing bits of maintenance and making a major provisioning trip to Waitrose, conveniently located only a few yards outside the marina. It also gave the opportunity to study the boats in the basin, many of which were large live-aboard barges although few were occupied at the weekend - they must be weekday crash-pads. A little research turned up the fact that one had been owned until recently by David Suchet and another used as a recording studio by a famous pop artist - the name has escaped.

In the afternoon, the Skipper's daughter Jo and family arrived and after drinking much tea and settling in, we walked across to Zizzi again where we had a lovely evening, joined by brother-in-law Pat and his wife Celia who came down for supper from Stoke Newington on their bikes.

Sunday was another lovely morning and after breakfast, there was a family trip by river boat to Greenwich. Bagheera was a bit like a railways station that day, with lots of comings and goings; the Skipper came straight back from the river boat to find that Mike Gill had arrived and soon after, Nicola De Quincey dropped by for coffee. Mike went off to do the last of the provisioning as Jo and family returned in time for tea. As they left to catch the train home, Shaun Nesbitt and John Yates arrived and the Leg 2A crew was assembled. After they had settled in, we had an indifferent and overpriced meal with poor wine in the Turkish restaurant in the Docks and slept uneasily, not helped by the massive thunderstorms with torrential rain during the night which together with the thought of an early morning ahead of us kept us wakeful.

### **Monday 29th May 2017 - St. Katharine Docks to Pyefleet Creek**

As we had been advised of a 0600 locking out time, the crew was up for tea at 0515 but with the tide taking its time to rise (and possibly some misjudgment by the Marina staff!) it was not until 0700 that we were called to leave the berth and enter a crowded lock.

At 0735 we left the lock and headed out down the river in a grey and gloomy morning. It was interesting to note how many different things we saw on the way down that we had missed on the way up but with 3 knots of tide under us, we covered the ground fast. At 0815 we passed through the Thames Barrier and we still had 2 knots of fair tide at Gravesend. The tide finally turned against us at London Gateway as we fortified ourselves with coffee and the first round of Tunnock's Caramel Wafers, the old Bagheera staple.

As we ran down the sea reach, we met a flotilla of elegant and beautifully maintained classic motor yachts coming up the river, all of a similar type and flying a St. George's flag from the jackstaff. We wondered where they came from, what they were and where they were all going.

After calling Thames VTS, we crossed over to the north side of the estuary and headed away towards the edge of Maplin Sands, now sailing with a good breeze although the sunshine had left us. By 1610 we were off the Maplin Edge buoy and entered the Middle Deep; it was an unusual feeling for those of us used to south-west coast sailing to be 5 miles offshore and in a narrow channel with sandbanks either side of us.

We had decided on the River Colne for the night and after passing through the Wallet Spitway had some interesting pilotage, identifying with some difficulty the cluster of buoys round the Colne Bar. It was fortunate that we had John Yates on board, much of whose experience had been in these waters, and it was on his recommendation that we headed for Pyefleet Creek for the night.

This turned out to be a great choice and after searching for enough depth to anchor, we chose well and enjoyed a perfectly still evening with only the cries of curlews and oyster-catchers to disturb us.

After supper, we had the Kenyan Beans debate; is it better to support the Kenyan economy by flying fresh green beans to consumers in the developed world or to save the environment and leave Kenyan farmers to the vagaries of their internal market?

Day's run 68.3nm, engine hours 10.8

### **Tuesday 30th May 2017 - Pyefleet Creek to Woolverstone**

It was time for Bagheera to explore some Arthur Ransome territory and also for the crew to have a slightly more leisurely day. At 0950 we left Pyefleet Creek but even after towing the anchor under the bow all the way out to the Colne Point buoy, we were unable to remove all the sticky mud that clung to it. We had a good SW Force 4 to bowl us along the coast past Frinton ("Harwich for the Continent, Frinton for the incontinent...."). The former is not so apt these days but as for the latter, who knows?

At 1545 we entered the Walton Backwaters, famous as "Secret Water" in Arthur Ransome's book of that name. It was a little disappointing to find it so full of moorings and the sprawl of Titchmarsh Marina but we picked up a vacant mooring and enjoyed tea as the sun came out before leaving for the Orwell. This turned out to be a lovely part of the trip, with all the bustle and interest of Felixstowe and Shotley giving way to the pastoral beauty of the Orwell. The wind had dropped and it was now warm sunshine (the first of the cruise?) as we motored up the river, enjoying the variety of yachts and the changing landscape. By 1920 we were moored in Woolverstone Marina and walked along the river to the Butt and Oyster at Pin Mill, famous from "We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea". Pin Mill was lovely and it was easy to identify the Arthur Ransome landmarks such as Alma Cottage but the meal at the Butt and Oyster was a bit disappointing, with staff that studiously avoided eye contact and indifferent food. Still, the views from the windows as the sun set made up for it.

Day's run 39.3 nm, engine hours 3.3.

### **Wednesday 31st May 2017 - Woolverstone to Lowestoft**

0650 saw the early birds ashore for showers and after breakfast, it was a great treat to find Arthur Ransome's old yacht "Nancy Blackett", the "Goblin" in "We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea", moored in the marina and the Skipper had some obligatory photos taken, including one in the cockpit - well, I do support the Nancy Blackett Trust! At 0830 we moved round to the fuel dock where unfortunately, John had a nasty accident while leaping ashore, sprawling headlong on the pontoon and crashing into some equipment. Nobody knew how it happened but he finished up with some nasty abrasions and a contusion over his eye. We did think about an emergency trip to the Doctor but as John was a Doctor himself, he reassured us that he was able to continue, albeit looking as though he had done ten rounds with a particularly vicious gorilla.

We had enjoyed Woolverstone and the whole area and Cruise Objective No. 2 had been well and truly achieved. After fueling up, we left the marina but there was little wind as we dropped down the Orwell and motored out past the Beach End Buoy. With all the Martello towers along the coast and the Deben and the Ore River entrances beckoning, we wished that we could have spent more time in these intriguing estuaries. It was not until after midday that we picked up a light easterly but unfortunately we were now stemming a strong foul tide and so progress was slow as we passed Sizewell Nuclear Power Station; Southwold had been the destination for the night but we

were well past the recommended time for entry and so carried on to Lowestoft, where we arrived at 1845, mooring in the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club basin in the evening sunshine. The clubhouse was very attractive and we all fancied staying in the "penthouse suite" in the lantern tower at the top of the dome!

Day's run 54.1nm, engine hours 6.5.

#### **Thursday 1st/Friday 2nd June 2017 - Lowestoft to Whitby**

For a deep-keel cruiser such as Bagheera, the options for shelter going north from Lowestoft are few for around 100 miles or more. After Great Yarmouth, there is no harbour of refuge between Lowestoft and the Humber, the little ports of Blakeney and Wells-next-the-Sea being fair weather, neap tide approaches only. After them, there is the mouth of The Wash to be crossed, with a network of channels between sandbanks stretching far offshore. With a decent forecast and nobody showing enthusiasm for going into the Humber, we decided to make the long hop directly to Whitby - Objective No. 3! It would have been nice to spend some more time in Lowestoft as the town had a faded prosperity and some interesting waterfront and the Yacht Club was very welcoming but we couldn't waste a decent forecast and left the marina at 1000, logging a passage report with Humber Coastguard as we motored out past Great Yarmouth with its busy traffic to and from the nearby wind farms. By 1130 a fresh south-easterly breeze had arrived and we made good progress up the coast with a favourable tide. We got up "close and personal" with Scroby Wind Farm, one of the first we had been really near to - very interesting. A texted conversation took place with the Skipper's son-in-law Danny about the technicalities of the various turbines.

It was a lovely sunny day, although cool, and we wove our way up the coast through the maze of wind farms and sandbanks. As the evening wore on the wind died and we motored through the night and the wind farms, with plenty of traffic to keep us on our toes, particularly as we crossed the Humber estuary. Ships were entering and leaving and several were moored or mooring in the anchoring zone north of the South Sand buoy. Although the wind returned for a few hours after midnight, it didn't last.

At 0845, we re-crossed the Greenwich Meridian, with the rest of the cruise being to the west of it. Flamborough Head looked wonderful with sun on it and we enjoyed the huge variety of seabirds which live on its cliffs, especially the gannets from what is one of the few mainland gannet colonies in Britain. As Scarborough came abeam, the breeze returned and we enjoyed a couple of hours' sailing before anchoring in Robin Hood's Bay for a cup of tea while waiting for the tide to rise sufficiently for us to enter Whitby. Although the village looked attractive, it was an uncomfortable anchorage with a swell reflected off the rocks causing us to roll fitfully. Finally, at 1800, we left Robin Hood's Bay and rounded the corner into Whitby where we arrived at 1930 - Bagheera had arrived in her port of registration and Objective No. 3 was achieved. Initially we were tied up alongside a fishing boat until the bridge opened and we were then able to enter the harbour, mooring in the "marina" alongside a deserted Contessa 32 for the night.

It had been a long passage of 33.5 hours and we were all hungry. Sadly, the Magpie Café, famous for its fish and chips, had burnt down and was closed for refurbishment but we found an excellent substitute in Trenchers - very smart, almost art deco, with friendly staff and wonderful fish and chips. After that, sleep....

Day's run 180.7 nm, engine hours 19.7 (too many!).



### **Saturday 3rd June 2017 - Whitby**

Nobody was familiar with Whitby and so with the sun shining, the crew dispersed in different directions to explore. Sadly, the steam bus no longer runs but there was plenty to see and do. It seems to be a place of two halves - on the west side of the harbour, the front is all chip shops, pinball arcades and pubs, with serious eating and drinking going on all day - we speculated on the tonnage of fish and chips eaten in a day in Whitby and the gallons of beer drunk by the raucous stag parties. The other side of the harbour, with the ruins of the Abbey towering above it, is much quieter with old fishermen's cottages, little back alleys leading down to the waterfront and odd coffee shops and smokeries. The views from the top were spectacular and the Abbey a source of great interest.

Back in the marina, we chatted to Leah, the young Duty Manager and a member of the lifeboat crew. She was a sweet and helpful girl but clearly had some health problems which were leading her to give up her job at the marina.

It was time for a cruise dinner and after detailed research by Mike, we enjoyed a pleasant evening in the Four Seasons.

### **Sunday 4th June 2017 - Whitby to Hartlepool**

Although we had allowed three nights in Whitby, two seemed enough and so soon after 0900 we left the marina and took the 0930 bridge opening. It was a fresh, sparkling day, with the wind with enough west in it to give us the first serious beat of the cruise. As the day went on, the weather became more unstable and we were hit by heavy rain and 30 knot squalls, causing some hurried reefing. The scenery to start with was of unspoilt coastline but as we neared the Tees it became more and more industrial. Salt Scar buoy came abeam at 1400 and then we were jilling around outside Hartlepool, waiting for a lock to enter the marina. Eventually at about 1530 we entered the lock, followed by a D Class lifeboat towing in a broken-down fishing boat. As the lock opened, a most extraordinary incident happened; as the Skipper was down below taking an important but short phone call, the lifeboat crew, who had been standing around chatting, suddenly announced that they had to go on another shout and even though there was nobody at the helm, cast off Bagheera's lines! Not very good behaviour for a lifeboat crew. No harm was done though and we moored up safely in the marina in the strong breeze.

Day's run 27.0 miles, engine hours 1.7.

### **Monday 5th June - Hartlepool to Newcastle upon Tyne**

Hartlepool marina is tidal in the entrance and after some discussion with the lockkeeper, it was decided that we had to be out of the harbour by 0600. After a cup of tea at 0530, we were in the lock and just scraped over the shallows between the inner pierheads.

It was a grey, blustery morning and with the wind gusting SSW 5-6, we tied down two reefs and settled down to a wet sail. Even bacon and egg sandwiches failed to lift the gloomy mood of the crew in the short trip up the coast to the Tyne.

The Tyne is now a major exporter of cars, all built at the Nissan plant near Sunderland and just south of the Tyne pierheads, we called the Tyne VTS and were asked to wait while a car transporter came out under pilot. The Skipper hove to but wasn't paying attention and Bagheera drifted North past the south pierhead and we got a ticking off from the VTS for (apparently) obstructing the pilot's drop-off point, although this seemed improbable.

Entering the Tyne, his home port, was an emotional moment for the Skipper. We passed Tynemouth with its Priory and statue of Admiral Collingwood looking out to sea, past the North Shields fish quays, past the Penny Dodger (the ferry between North and South Shields) and on into the old shipbuilding area. Much is now deserted but it was good to see that the old Swan Hunter Neptune Yard was busy again, now making jackets for gas fields and various parts of wind turbines. It was difficult to envisage the old days when great liners and warships were built on the old slipways, now owned by Freddie Shepherd, once a Newcastle scrap merchant but these days with signs for "Shepherd Offshore" on much of the riverbank.

Once past the former shipbuilding area, it was good to see how much the riverbank has been regenerated, with lots of trees and walks making it unrecognisable from the industrial landscape of old. Then we came round a corner and there were the Baltic Flour Mill, now a contemporary art gallery, the Sage Concert Hall and all the wonderful bridges of the Tyne - first of all, the Millennium Bridge, the famous "winking eye". We were a little early for our scheduled lift time and so had to jill about in the rain but it was worth waiting for as it rose above us and we cruised through to moor just downstream from the great Tyne Bridge in what is called Newcastle City Marina - in fact, a single long pontoon but secure and serviced with electricity and water. There were no other visitors and soon the loquacious Gary, a Geordie with an overlay of an Aussie accent, was welcoming us and giving us lots of information. Objective No. 4 achieved!

It was time for a crew change and John left us here and as we had planned for a three-night stay, Shaun went home to visit his daughter. The Skipper went to supper with friends (clutching a bag of laundry!) while Mike minded the ship.

Day's run 27.9nm, engine hours 2.5.

### **Tuesday 6th/Wednesday 7th June 2017 - Newcastle upon Tyne**

Tuesday dawned with the rain drumming on the coachroof. Mike and the Skipper enjoyed an unusual breakfast at the Swedish Dala café opposite the marina run by a Swede with, yes, you guessed, a strong Geordie accent! Then Mike went off on one of his legendary walkabouts (or, in this case, busabouts) to among other places the Angel of the North while the Skipper quite frankly idled about and caught up on sleep.

In the evening, with the rain still falling, the Skipper's niece (and god-daughter) Sarah came for a lovely supper in the warmth and shelter of Bagheera's saloon.

Wednesday morning was dry and the sun soon came out, although the river was in full spate after the previous day's rain. As a result, high tide was even higher and the ebb continued long after the flood should have started. The wind picked up as the day went on and out to sea, it was clearly blowing a full gale - it was lucky that we were on a lay-day. It was provisioning day and Mike went to Tesco while the Skipper went to Waitrose and as a result, the boat was groaning with food. Our genial host Gary came by and organised a tour of the workings of the Millennium Bridge with Tony the Bridgmaster - the lift mechanism is a wonderful piece of heavy engineering.

After lunch, new crew member Patrick arrived and Gary came up trumps once again with a tour of the Rachel Douglas, a traditional Northumbrian fishing boat which was moored in the marina. Down below she was very interesting but we couldn't believe that she still went to sea as her engine was a badly-maintained museum piece.

Finally, Shaun returned from Stirling and we enjoyed an excellent dinner at Caffé Vino and a good sleep to prepare for the next leg.

**Leg 2A cruise distance 397.3, engine hours 43.9**

**Cumulative distance from Dartmouth 692.0nm, engine hours 83.2**

## **LEG 2B - NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE TO INVERNESS**

### **Thursday 8th June 2017 - Newcastle upon Tyne to Amble**

It was raining again as we left the marina at 0755, waving to Tony in the Millennium Bridge control room as we passed under it. The log was not working and turned out to be completely clogged with sea lice - unusual as we had been in at worst brackish water.

The trip down the river was interesting as shipping movements were taking place - a huge car transporter was being manoeuvred alongside by a bevy of tugs while across the river, the Amsterdam ferry was arriving, berthing herself without the need for tugs. Tyne VTS was not responding and so we had to make our own decisions as to what to do.

The North pier light came abeam at 0935 and we left the Tyne in the rain, much as we had arrived! In addition, the visibility was poor and Newbiggin and Blyth passed almost unseen but at least we were able to sail in a light south-easterly breeze. Off Lynemouth Power Station, one of the Skipper's old construction sites, we met our first Northumbrian coble out fishing - it is lovely that these iconic craft are still working boats.

1345 found us in the narrow, rock-girt channel between Coquet Island and the oddly-named Podler Ware Spit - it looked frightening on the chart but as it was almost high tide, we had plenty of water. As we entered the River Coquet, the rain eased off and by the time we moored in Amble Marina, it had stopped altogether and the sun came out, giving us a lovely afternoon.

Apart from the fact that it's an attractive spot, the main reason for visiting Amble Marina was to see the Skipper's best man and his wife, John and Ros. John soon appeared and took the crew on a conducted tour of Warkworth (where the Skipper used to live) with its lovely castle and fine stone houses and also a tour of his extensive farmlands in the area. After that it was tea with Ros at Low Buston Hall, followed by an inspection of John's fine car collection, which includes a fine and unique Bugatti Type 35B bought by John's father from Viscount Ridley for £250 in about 1952!

Later, John and Ros came for supper on board Bagheera and we were briefly joined by their eldest son David, the Skipper's godson. Objective No. 5 had been comprehensively achieved.

Day's run 26.4nm, engine hours 2.5.

### **Friday 9th June 2017 - Amble to Holy Island**

As we couldn't get out of Amble Marina until the early afternoon (it has a tidal cill), the crew enjoyed a lazy morning, exploring the town and taking photographs. The Skipper was anxious about his ability to steer Bagheera out of her berth astern through the narrow gap between the hammerheads and so the crew was summoned for an exercise in wearing ship - turning her on the berth so that she was bows out to the exit. After that we all needed sustenance and repaired to the rather good Fat Mermaid restaurant for an excellent lunch.

We left Amble at 1410 and found a brisk WSW wind outside, necessitating a single reef in the main. It was a great sail on a sparkling early summer day, past the great castles of Dunstanburgh and Bamburgh and the seaside villages of Beadnell and Seahouses and the wonderful sweeps of

unspoilt sandy beaches which are the well-kept secret of the Northumbrian coast. We passed close to the Inner Farne with its seals and seabirds before tackling the complex navigation leading into the anchorage at Holy Island. There are some tall leading marks but as they are of similar height, it was difficult to know whether we were ahead of them or behind them. Still, we managed and anchored in 6 metres below The Heugh. Although we were quite safe, the anchorage felt bleak and exposed, particularly as the weather had turned grey again. However as the tide fell and the sandbanks to windward of us became exposed, we felt a bit more secure and the night passed without incident.

Day's run 26.2nm, engine hours 1.6.

### **Saturday 10th June 2017 - Holy Island to Eyemouth**

The log records that the Skipper was up in the night checking for dragging but the holding was good and we hadn't moved much, if at all. With more rain falling and a fresh breeze generating a chop in the anchorage, the crew was reluctant to rise and even more reluctant to go ashore. By midday however the rain had eased off and the height of tide was sufficient for us to leave, passing close by Lindisfarne Castle which was shrouded in scaffolding while repairs were being carried out. With a strong breeze out of the south-west, we made good progress up the coast, passing Berwick-on-Tweed and at 1600 entering Scotland! Soon afterwards the wind deserted us but the sun emerged and we motored the last few miles into Eyemouth, enjoying the dramatic entrance and the complete shelter of the narrow harbour inside.

It was a charming place, full of character and interest with two resident harbour seals to keep us amused in the warm evening sunshine. The crew dispersed in various directions to explore and photograph, meeting up at the Contented Sole for an average supper.

Day's run 20.6nm, engine hours 1.3.

### **Sunday 11th June 2017 - Eyemouth to Arbroath**

After a few days of short sails, it was time to put some distance under the keel. We left Eyemouth at 0755 at about half-ebb, filing a passage report with Aberdeen Coastguard, and we had a roaring sail with the south-westerly breeze varying between force 4 and 6 all day as we passed various landmarks. Torness Nuclear Power Station glinted in the sunshine and the Bass Rock showed far up the Firth of Forth. It would have been good to visit Edinburgh, the Skipper's Alma Mater, but the distance to a safe harbour was too great a diversion and we ploughed on across the entrance to the Firth. The Isle of May came up and at 1405 the Bell Rock with its Stephenson lighthouse was abeam to starboard 3 miles away as we worked our way across the mouth of the Firth of Tay.

With the south-westerly breeze having blown all day, there was an awkward swell running outside Arbroath and it was only possible to drop the mainsail and bundle it very loosely before we entered the harbour, threading our way through a maze of lobster pots - the most we had seen this side of Maine! It is an awkward entrance with little turning room but we were soon berthed safely alongside a friendly Swedish yacht with the assistance of a very helpful berthing master.

As the weather was again threatening rain, we repaired to the Old Boatyard for the Skipper's treat of tea and very good cakes, then entertaining our Swedish neighbours Janne and Grilla to drinks, after which Mike cooked an amazing dish of baked hot-smoked salmon. All in all, a good cruising day.

Day's run 42.7nm, engine hours 1.1.

### **Monday 12th June - Arbroath to Peterhead**

The time of getting out of Arbroath was interesting - gate opens 0715, gate closes 0728! We had to be up early but Janne had been up even earlier and presented us with a plateful of freshly-baked cinnamon buns for breakfast, rather like cinnamon-flavoured Welsh cakes.

Once outside, it was a case of "pots before our eyes"! It was a minefield of traps for the unwary and Arbroath is certainly not a place to be entered at night. The stiff WSW breeze was still blowing and we had a great sail, with plenty to see. A vast oil platform drifted along the horizon with its attendant tugs and Red Head lived up to its name - fine red cliffs with emerald-green grass graced the coastline. Lovely names came and went - Lunan Bay, Scurdie Ness (the entrance to Montrose), Bervie Brow lighthouse, Dunottar Castle high above Stonehaven and then we reached Girdle Ness and Aberdeen, the oil capital of Scotland. Here was plenty of evidence of the lack of offshore oil activity, with at least 25 service vessels anchored in the area and probably plenty more inside, waiting for work - a vast amount of under-utilised capital.

North of Aberdeen is the long sweep of Balmedie beach with its fine sand dunes and we averted our eyes from Donald Trump's ghastly golf course! Newburgh came next, where the Skipper lived for three years, although it was difficult to pick out the narrow and shallow entrance to the Ythan Estuary. The wonderful Sands of Forvie brought back happy memories of walks over the nature reserve to Collieston, the bird life varying from the eider ducks of the estuary to the terns of the dunes to the grouse of the heathland behind the dunes, all within a very short distance.

This is a coast of fine castles and next up was Old Slains Castle, another ruin (blown up in 1594 by King James VI!) known locally as Dracula's Castle as it was believed by locals to have inspired Bram Stoker to write Dracula. This was closely followed by New Slains Castle, also a ruin but a more modern one. The Bullers of Buchan are dramatic cliffs that are the nesting site of thousands of fulmars and kittiwakes and then round the corner of Buchan Ness came Peterhead Power Station, where the Skipper had spent 5 years of his career on its construction and Shaun had spent some 2 years constructing the oil jetty and indeed this was where they had met. It's always a sobering thought for a civil engineer when facilities that one has built become redundant and this was about to happen to Peterhead. Fortunately for the town, the fishing industry is still buoyant and Peterhead still lands more fish than the whole of the rest of the United Kingdom put together - an amazing statistic.

After calling Harbour Control and getting permission to enter, we made our way across the bay and moored in Peterhead Marina - not the most scenic place in Scotland but with plenty of space and reasonable facilities. It had been a great sail with a good sailing breeze and little rain (only Pat got wet off Aberdeen!) - over 60 miles covered from harbour to harbour in less than twelve hours - and no motoring! Objective No. 6 had been achieved.

Day's run 63.4nm, engine hours 0.6.

### **Tuesday 13th June 2017 - Peterhead to Whitehills**

The morning dawned very still and the crew were ashore early for showers. We left the marina at 0845 to catch the tide round Rattray Head and Kinnaird Head, a major tidal gate marking the point at which one turns west into the Moray Firth. With only a breath of a southerly breeze, we had to motor most of the morning; although we enjoyed an hour of gentle sailing past Kinnaird Head, it was a fickle breeze and soon died away altogether. This was another interesting coastline, with

another busy fishing port at Fraserburgh, the attractive old villages of Gardenstown and Pennan and the sea-cliffs of Troup Head, home to thousands of seabirds and another gannet colony.

At 1600 we arrived in Whitehills; Bertie Mills, the Harbourmaster, was on the pierhead and warned us that it was a tight entry. We thought he meant the harbour entry - but when we saw the berth he intended us to get into, we realised what he had really meant! The clearance between the sterns of the boats in their finger berths and the quay wall was significantly less than Bagheera's overall length and it was a heart-in-mouth job to berth her successfully and without damaging adjacent boats.

Once safely in, we made a compulsory visit to Downie's the Fishmonger, a famous port of call. As a result we enjoyed an excellent supper cooked by Mike of fillets of sole wrapped in Parma ham and baked with courgettes and new potatoes - lovely!

There had a been a space on the pontoon in the outer harbour but Bertie explained that he had kept the berth available for a boat from the Ellen McArthur Trust which was also doing a circumnavigation. The Trust exists to help children who have suffered from cancer recover their confidence - a very worthwhile cause. Many of the population of Whitehills turned out to welcome the boat as it docked.

Day's run 37.9nm, engine hours 6.6.

### **Wednesday 14th June 2017 - Whitehills to Lossiemouth**

The only thing that disturbed the Skipper's sleep was this; having got into this berth, how on earth am I going to get out of it? I needn't have worried - Bertie had seen it all before and had it all worked out.

For the first time on the whole cruise, after a nice lie-in it was warm enough for breakfast in the cockpit and even the shorts got the mould dusted off them! At 1125, we summoned Bertie from his office to help us extricate ourselves. In the end it was no drama; he threw us a line from the dock wall so that we could keep the bow up to the wind and as we slid out of the berth, he gave the bow a good shove round so that we cleared the quay wall with at least an inch to spare - well, maybe a foot - or two.....

Outside, we found a lovely SSE Force 3/4 blowing and set off on a broad reach in warm sunshine; this was what it was supposed to be like in summer! However, as winds from this quarter frequently are, it proved fickle and by lunchtime we were motoring. The log reports that "the wind teased us all the way along the Moray Firth" - and so it did; one minute we were sailing again on a reach, then it died, then returned on our nose - very frustrating.

1630 saw us trying to raise Lossiemouth Harbour on the radio but there was no answer. The visitors' area was crowded and we selected a Finnish yacht to go alongside which turned out not to be a great idea as although friendly, a lot of drink was in evidence. It turned out that they were in the middle of an epic voyage which had taken them up through Russia and round the North Cape to Norway and across to Lossiemouth where they had laid up for the winter, the boat in fact having only been launched that morning.

Don't worry, they said, we are leaving for Inverness in half-an-hour. A quick glance at the boat suggested that was unlikely; there were no sails bent on, the cockpit was full of loose gear (and empty beer cans) and down below was a complete shambles which out-did anything that Bagheera ever managed at fitting-out time. Half-an-hour came and went and so did they - to the pub!

Having failed to locate anybody in the Harbour Office (it seemed to close at about 1600) we followed the instructions and paid our dues at the Steamboat Inn, where at least they knew what was wanted.

A text came to say that the Finns were intending to leave at 2330 and we decided to move, not liking the idea of a well-oiled skipper trying to get out from under us at low water - or even having to stay alongside them. Our move was not without incident because we ran aground for a few moments in the middle of the harbour, reinforcing our impression that Lossiemouth is not well-maintained for yachts.

At 2200, the Finns returned, jumped on to the boat and set off for Inverness; we couldn't believe it as they had been drinking solidly for about 5 hours by then. Anyway, we had a peaceful night.

Day's run 23.8nm, engine hours 2.6.

### **Thursday 15th June 2017 - Lossiemouth to Inverness**

There was a frisson of excitement about as this was the day on which we should make the Caledonian Canal. We needed to make sure that we would be in the sea lock before it closed for the night and so left at 0635, with bacon sandwiches for breakfast under way.

Initially, we had a fine beat under full sail with the wind SSW Force 4 but again it proved fickle, coming and going but eventually settling down in the south-west, just where we didn't really want it. We were alternately on our ear and over-canvased and then motoring with not enough wind to sail, beating into Burghead Bay and then out again towards the Cromarty Firth where drilling platforms were moored outside awaiting work. By the South Sutor, it was evident that we would need to motor-sail if we were not to miss the tide at Chanonry Point, the narrows off Fort George and the entrance to the Inverness Firth. It became quite a slog but was made up for by the wonderful display of dolphins as we arrived at Chanonry Point, with the beach crowded with onlookers and a pleasure boat chasing around madly pursuing the dolphins - very bad behaviour. Among the onlookers was the Skipper's older sister Ann but it was difficult to pick her out from a cable or so off.

Once through the narrows at 1400, we knew that we had the tide still with us for a couple of hours and so were able to sail again. It was great fun as we beat across to Alturlie Point on the Inverness shore and we shot the Kessock Bridge at about 1500 but then things got serious as first we were hit by a severe squall which caused us to roll the yankee away in a hurry but not before it had caught on something and ripped the corner of the clew. Then having established with the Sea Lock that if we hurried we would just beat the trains through the Clachnaharry bridge, we lost a fender overboard which necessitated a hasty man-overboard drill. It was recovered safely but by then we were late and had to wait just above the sea lock at Corpach for half-an-hour. It was not a hardship though and enabled all the paperwork for the canal transit to be completed, including paying the transit fee of £439.....! The lock-keeper was wonderfully helpful, truly in the long tradition of the Caledonian Canal and a mine of useful information.

By 1700 we were allowed through the rail ridge and moored up in the Muirton Basin at Seaport Marina at 1745, finding Charlie and Veronica Barrington on the pontoon to welcome us. We had a slightly embarrassing arrival, the Skipper losing control in the fresh breeze blowing us off the pontoon, with the stem catching a previously unseen pile at the front of the berth, cut off just below pontoon level and a trap for the unwary. Still, Leg 2 was complete! Charlie and Veronica stayed for a cup of tea before heading back to Skye and the process began of tidying and packing

for the crew's departure. It was decided on several recommendations to have a crew supper at the Clachnaharry Inn but oh dear! It summed up all that is awful about Scottish catering. Mike was outraged to find that the wine he had chosen was only a few degrees below boiling point (microwaved to warm it up?) and the food was stodgy and unimaginative. Still, the venue was pleasant, looking out over the firth to the Black Isle.

Day's run 42.7nm, engine hours 6.4.

### **Friday 16th/Saturday 17th June 2017 - Inverness, Muirton Basin**

Pat was up early and away to catch the direct train to London and then the rest of the crew set to work to sort out the boat. As the wind had now moderated, the first task was to take down the yankee to assess the damage. Unfortunately, it would not drop and even sending the Skipper up the mast failed to identify the problem.

Meanwhile, Gerry, a very experienced electrician from Caley Marine, had arrived to try to find what was wrong with the bow navigation light. To our relief, it turned out not to be the selector switch but a faulty earth caused by a badly-made connection in the chain locker. He recommended Robin, a experienced rigger, to sort out the problem of the yankee. He duly arrived and was soon up the mast, where he identified the problem as being the yankee halyard fouling the split pin on the clevis pin which secured the forestay to the mast. The yankee was then dropped, bagged up and delivered by Robin to Owen Sails' collection point at Caley Marine for repair.

Meanwhile, the Skipper's sister Ann, crew for the next leg, came for coffee and lunch and to familiarise herself with the boat - and nobly to take home a huge pile of laundry from Leg 2! Shaun went home after lunch and Mike and the Skipper finished off the cleaning and tidying and enjoying the historic Muirton Basin before having a quiet supper on board - much better than a poor Scottish pub!

In the morning, Mike headed off by taxi to catch a plane home while the Skipper did a major shop at the Co-op to prepare Bagheera for her next adventure (but no Tunnock's - disaster!), before heading off himself to catch the Loganair buzz plane back to Exeter via a longish stop in Manchester.

**Leg 2B cruise distance 283.7nm, engine hours 22.7**

**Cumulative distance from Dartmouth 975.7nm, engine hours 105.9.**

## **LEG 3 - THE CALEDONIAN CANAL**

### **Sunday 25th June 2017 - Inverness, Muirton Basin**

Mike arrived at 1100 from the airport and carried out his usual amazing shop for the fresh food, with the weather still mixed - occasional warm sunshine followed by a gusty wind and heavy showers. The Skipper and Diana arrived in the late afternoon, having collected the repaired sail from the collection point at Caley Marine. Owen Sails' bill for the repair including collection from Caley Marine and delivery to Benderloch, the repair itself (involving a major patch) and a special courier back to Caley Marine was £57.60 - extraordinary value and great efficiency. Bagheera was now ready to go again! Mike cooked one of his wonderful suppers of salmon baked with leeks, crème fraiche and pasta - lovely.



Seaport Marina was an interesting place; on our pontoon alone there were yachts from Sweden, Poland, Canada and Belgium - we hadn't appreciated just how many nationalities used the canal these days. The staff were helpful and the facilities good, even if it was a long walk to the shower block.

### **Monday 26th June 2017 - Muirton to Fort Augustus**

Ann arrived at 0800, bearing all the clean laundry - such service! The Skipper had booked the first lock up from Muirton and so at 0930 we left the berth and jilled around in the basin, waiting for a large guest-carrying barge to go through the Muirton Bridge ahead of us. At last we were through in company with Dobra, the Polish yacht which was our constant companion through the canal.

The first lock was a bit traumatic as we were up at the front where the turbulence was considerable but we soon got the hang of it. By 1130 we were at Tomnahurich Bridge then through Dochgarroch locks (getting confident now!) and out into the pretty waters of Loch Dochfour. It was almost a pit to pass Bona Ferry and out into the expanse of Loch Ness but it was also a little exciting as we were now really on our way. Castle Urquhart was abeam at 1335 and we ran down past Foyers under main only. A call to the lock-keepers at Fort Augustus gave us a hurry-up and it was on engine and a charge down the loch to get there in time for the last lock up. We arrived at 1605 and were soon in the lock system in company with some Caley Cruisers - pretty scary as one of them threatened to swing out of control and sweep down on to us, with its shore party unaware of the need to take a turn round the bollard to avoid being pulled into the lock. They managed by the skin of their teeth to stay out of the water and we steadily progressed up the ladder of five locks. Once at the top, as the rain started to fall again, we managed to secure a berth alongside the serviced pontoon just ahead of a Faroese traditional fishing boat, crewed by four Faroese fishermen who could have been straight out of a film.

Although The Bothy restaurant was very busy, we decided to wait for a table which came after only a short time. Supper was a big improvement on Clachnaharry but we were denied coffee when the power failed! The tills were not working and so we sat down with the staff to agree what we had eaten but although they still got the bill wrong, they would not accept any more money.

Day's run 24.0nm, engine hours 7.2.

### **Tuesday 27th June 2017 - Fort Augustus to Ardrishaig (Loch Oich)**

After a peaceful night, the promised rain arrived at 1000 as we plodged round Fort Augustus. It was slightly depressing, the redeeming features being an excellent butcher where we purchased some venison, prize-winning potato scones and excellent pork pies and the friendly girl in the coffee stall down by the ferry jetty, who told the Skipper all there was to know about Fort Augustus - and that wasn't much!

Although it was still grey, the rain eased off and we enjoyed the beautiful scenery as we passed through the remote and tree-surrounded Kytra lock, with the lock-keepers house in a cloud of house-martins and the equally lovely Cullochry lock before passing through Aberchalder swing bridge and out into the wide waters of Loch Oich, where the sun came out and we even managed to sail for a while. It is a lovely loch and we enjoyed the mountains, the glorious wooded banks and of course the ruins of Invergarry Castle. Loch Oich represents the highest point on the canal and from here it was downhill all the way.

We had decided to give Ann her first taste of being at anchor for the night and after much checking of depth (the bottom shoals so steeply there was a risk of the anchor sliding off down the slope) we anchored just south of Ardrishaig, in a lovely spot all on our own.

Diana cooked an excellent stir-fry and as we went to bed, the wind dropped and we had a very peaceful night.

Day's run 7.0nm (the shortest of the whole cruise!), engine hours 3.7.

### **Wednesday 28th June 2017 - Ardrishaig (Loch Oich) to Caol (Corpach)**

The Skipper had to offer a cooked breakfast as the only way to get the crew out of bed and so it was bacon, mushrooms and potato scones for breakfast. At 0900 we moored on the end of the pontoon at the rather desultory Watersports Centre - there was nobody about who knew anything and the facilities were very poor. With no reason to stay, we were soon off again and passed through Laggan Bridge and entered Laggan Avenue, a narrow tree-lined section of the canal which feels very enclosed and mysterious. At the end of it came Laggan locks, another lovely spot which looks out from the top lock down the whole length of Loch Lochy. The lock-keeper was busy cutting his grass and was not answering his radio but once the full complement of boats had arrived (including Dobra) we descended into Loch Lochy, finding descent much easier than ascent as there is so much less turbulence.

This was a lovely sail, with Ann at the helm as we ran down the loch under yankee alone, still doing a steady 5-6 knots. The scenery became much grander as the trees gave way to open mountainsides with the clear sky giving great views towards the Mamore range and Ben Nevis. We found a lovely spot to anchor for lunch in Achnaharry Bay on the north shore, out of the now brisk north-easterly breeze behind a shallow spit. We watched with interest as a fisherman plied his trade but without luck - "when the wind is in the east, then the fishes bite the least" as the old adage goes.

At 1400 we left Achnaharry Bay and motored across the short distance to Gairloch, where the scenery changed again. Several yachts were moored in the basin before the locks but we needed to keep going and passed on through the top lock and the swing bridge, one of the locks being open as there was plenty of water to allow this to happen. From here on to Banavie, it became pastoral although always in the distance were the mountains.

Once at Banavie, the decision had to be made; should we carry on down Neptune's Staircase or stay at Banavie for the night? The vote was for descent and after a short wait, we entered the top lock and started our way down in company once again with Dobra. The thought of descending such a long staircase (eight locks in total) had been a trifle daunting but the lock-keepers are so helpful that with their assistance and Diana ashore with a warp, it was only an hour-and-a-half to make the whole descent. Once down and through the railway swing bridge, we moored to the pontoon just below Banavie jetty for the night. Soon after we had tied up, the Skipper's and Ann's nephew Jamie arrived on his way home to Strontian and we had a good chat before repairing to the Lochy Inn for supper, which was no better or worse than we had expected it to be.....

And the rain fell again.....although not before we had a wonderful glimpse of the summit of Ben Nevis peeping out of its cloud cap.

Day's run 16.3nm, engine hours 4.5.

### **Thursday 29th June 2017 - crew change day!**

It was a miserable morning with heavy rain. Nicola arrived at 1030 from the overnight sleeper from London while Diana and Ann prepared lunch for the next round of visitors, Ann's son Angus and his wife Alison. After a convivial lunch with them, they departed taking Ann and Diana with

them back to Inverness. Nicola and the Skipper plodged off to the nearby Caol Co-op in the rain for stores, arriving back just as Barrie arrived having had a heavy business lunch in Fort William with a client. Crew change No. 4 had been successfully completed!

Mike cooked a fantastic venison casserole for supper after which in the continuing rain we moved down to the pontoon just above the Corpach Double locks for the night.

Day's run minimal!

Leg 3 had been successfully completed.

**Leg 3 cruise distance 47.3nm, engine hours 14.4**

**Cumulative distance from Dartmouth 1023.0nm, engine hours 120.3**

## **LEG 4A - CORPACH TO LIVERPOOL**

### **Friday 30th June 2017 - Corpach to Little Horseshoe Bay, Kerrera**

The crew was up for tea at 0700 but we had a long wait before we could lock down into the Corpach basin. Eventually at 0900 we entered the double locks, only to find that they were a single lock that day as the levels made the operation of the second lock unnecessary. Once in the basin, it was all activity - we fuelled up, watered up, showered and bought some last-minute stores from the rather poor Corpach Co-op.

We had a long wait in the sea lock while a freighter slowly worked its way up Loch Shiel to the old pulp mill but at 1135, we were out into Loch Linnhe and salt water again. The wind was back in the north-east at about Force 4 and we had a lovely sail down Loch Linnhe past Fort William and through the Corran Ferry Narrows, the Skipper remembering how he had tacked through them after his last trip through the Caledonian Canal in 1965! Having a racing crew on board meant that there was no peace and so off Airds Bay, the cry was "up spinnaker"! We had a glorious sail down inside Lismore Island as the sun broke through (at last) and our arrival in the narrows at the entrance to Oban Bay coincided with the departure of a Caledonian Macbraynes ferry. It seemed as though it might be very tight but in fact we kept very close to the Kerrera shore and we passed each other without incident.

Oban felt like coming home as on a previous trip we had used the marina on Kerrera as a base. We could see the new small-craft pontoon off Oban foreshore as we passed, a long-overdue improvement, and admired the Dutch square-rigger moored in the bay. The wind kept up for us as we dropped down the Sound of Kerrera towards Little Horseshoe Bay, our destination for the night. The first time we anchored it didn't feel right but when it came to re-set, the anchor was well and truly fouled on a rock. For a while it seemed as though we might need a diver but after some judicious motoring from one side to the other, it came free and we re-moored successfully.

After a good shepherd's pie for supper, we watched the amazing light on the hillside opposite on the mainland shore as the sun set. A rare and beautiful highland evening - with no midgies.

Day's run 30.5nm, engine hours 2.0.

### **Saturday 1st July 2017 - Little Horseshoe Bay, Kerrera to Tayvallich**

A bright, sparkling morning with a brisk SSW wind blowing up the Sound of Kerrera. After scrambled eggs for breakfast, we broke out the anchor (easily) and set the main with one reef and

the full yankee. We tacked down the sound in fine style but as we came out from behind the island, the full force of the breeze hit us and we had to take in another reef and five rolls in the yankee. We made a long board in towards Easdale and tacked off the entrance to the famous Cuan Sound and out past Bono Rock - the only boat to be sailing in these conditions, although others motored past us with the tide, which was now strongly in our favour. Rather than go the direct route, we sailed round the back of Fladda Island and raced through the gap between Fladda and Ormsa, now doing nine knots over the ground. It was exciting stuff, with wind over tide kicking up a nasty sea but with the strong tide, progress was good. As we passed the entrance to the Gulf of Corryvreckan at 1515, the wind increased sharply and with the tide now 4 knots and gusts of almost 40 knots of apparent wind, it was time to take in the third reef.

Although the plan had been to go up the Sound of Islay to West Loch Tarbert Jura, one of the great anchorages of the West Highlands, the wind made this unsafe and we decided to head into Loch Sween, which we entered at 1645; suddenly, all was calm and we sailed in smooth water for a while before the wind dropped completely. With the exception of the awful caravan site near Castle Sween, Loch Sween is very pretty and we enjoyed motoring up to the head of the loch, where we took the main down before feeling our way into Tayvallich. We thought that it deserved its reputation as one of the prettiest and most sheltered anchorages on the mainland; the entrance is very narrow - only a couple of boat's lengths at most - between reefs on either side, creating a perfectly sheltered pool. Once inside the pool, there was a choice of moorings and we picked up a likely looking one and started to admire our surroundings. Just nearby was a glorious Nicholson 43, now perhaps forty years old but looking as though she had just come out of an expensive refit. Many other fine yachts confirmed that this was a serious sailing venue.

The Tayvallich Inn has a good reputation and we took the dinghy ashore and walked to it round the bay. It was jam packed with no free tables but we decided to stay - the beer was good and we were in no hurry. In the end, the supper was worth the wait, some very good seafood coming out of the kitchen.

Day's run 40.9nm, engine hours 1.9.

### **Sunday 2nd July 2017 - Tayvallich to Ardminish, Gigha**

Sadly, we woke again to rain drumming on the coachroof but by the time bacon sandwiches had been eaten, it had eased off. There was a crew run ashore to flush out the outboard, buy a few stores (including some fantastic ginger tablet!) and have a sneaky cappuccino at the café.

It was 1155 before we left and the weather steadily improved. Although we had still harboured thoughts of Islay, we decided to head to Gigha instead, taking advantage of the favourable tide through the Sound of Jura. We tacked our way out of Loch Sween, waving to the seals lounging on the rocky islets at the mouth of the loch. The wind became fickle and the rain returned and with big black clouds threatening, a second reef was taken in together with five rolls in the yankee.

We needn't have worried though and we were soon shaking them out again as the sun emerged and we had a lovely sail down past the north tip of Gigha, passing the Sgeir Nuadh buoy at 1615 and heading into Ardminish Bay. This was another lovely and rightly popular spot, with some 22 visitors' moorings laid but of which only 12 or so were occupied and so we were able to choose a good place for the night.

A run ashore to the pub was in order and we liked what we saw of Gigha, with its lovely white sandy beaches. We missed a trick though as the Boathouse Café looked to be the best seafood venue we had seen. Another time perhaps! The pub proved to be rather drab but Barrie found an

unusual malt to try - Monkey Shoulder; pretty good it was but at £5.50 a nip, so it should have been!

Day's run 23.5nm, engine hours 0.5 (excellent!).

### **Monday 3rd July 2017 - Ardminish, Gigha to Portpatrick**

The time had come once again to put some miles on the log. After a breakfast of Nicola's special muesli (oatmeal, grated apple, soft fruit and yoghurt, I think) there was a run ashore to the local shop for a few stores. It was an amazing place with a wide range of good things but as the ferry runs from Tarbert several times a day, Gigha is not too isolated.

We left Ardminish at 1020 with Mike "the Monk" Gill at the helm - unusually for him, it wasn't raining - normally, he's only allowed on the helm in rain, the heavier the better! It was a lovely morning and the original idea had been to head out to Rathlin Island but as we passed the Gialun West Cardinal at 7 knots, with the wind forecast to veer into the south-west, the idea got less attractive and we decided to head straight to Portpatrick. We ran down the west side of the Mull of Kintyre in glorious sunshine, passing places with such iconic names as Macrihanish on the way. As we approached the Mull, we caught up with a Vancouver 27 but he managed to stay ahead of us until he veered off to port, heading up the Clyde estuary, possibly to Campbeltown. We carried on, enjoying the changing scenery - first the mountains of Islay in the west, then the Mull to our east, then Rathlin on the horizon and the whole of Northern Ireland opening up as we passed through the North Channel, with Ireland only 15 miles away. Sanda Island looked attractive (it has a good anchorage) and Ailsa Craig (Paddy's Milestone) was on the horizon as we crossed the wide mouth of the Clyde estuary.

The wind was getting lighter now and we tried to set the cruising 'chute but it was not a success with the wind too far aft and the crew too lazy to rig it as a spinnaker. Eventually at 1700 we gave up sailing and started the engine as we still had 15 miles to run to Portpatrick. The sea was now like a millpond as we motored steadily down the Galloway coast.

The entrance to Portpatrick can best be described as "interesting" and how it operated for many years as a ferry terminal for Ireland was a mystery (the Skipper remembered from his prep. school geography that the Portpatrick to Donnaghadee ferry was an important route). We had some difficulty in picking up both the orange leading marks - the front one was easy to spot but the rear one was indistinct (the harbourmaster later told us that the lady on whose house the rear mark was fixed wouldn't allow him to make it any bigger!). Eventually we picked it up and sneaked in, leaving the small buoy marking a rock "fifteen feet to port" as instructed.

It was 2035 by the time we came alongside but Robert, the harbourmaster, appeared on the quayside and took our lines. There was no clear piece of wall and so we moored alongside a yacht from Wigton Sailing Club, three of whose boats were on a rally there. It was strange to have to think about the rise and fall of the tide when deciding on the length of mooring lines - we are all now too soft, being used to pontoons.

The Skipper had cooked a toad-in-the-hole but in trying to have it ready to eat immediately on arrival, it had got overcooked and the crispy bits had become charcoal! Still, it was all eaten.

Day's run 62.2nm, engine hours 4.8.

## **Tuesday 4th July 2017 - American Independence Day - Portpatrick**

Another wet morning. Our neighbours left to return to Wigton and we settled down to a lazy morning. The Skipper cooked a frittata for lunch as we had a guest, our old friend Alex Fergusson (no, not *that* one - but still *Sir* Alex!) who arrived at about 1300. We had a very convivial lunchtime and Alex was entertaining as always.

In the afternoon, we walked round to the Lifeboat shop but found it closed; instead, we were given something much better, a very interesting hour-and-a-half's tour of the Tamar class lifeboat by Coxswain Robert. The level of equipment on the boats is amazing but it was also fascinating to hear of some of the design issues with the boat - surely all the years of accumulated experience in the RNLI should have prevented them from happening?

We all liked Portpatrick, a place stuck in the late nineteenth century with lots of hotels and guest houses. The harbour was fun, full of small guillemots, kittiwakes and pigeons nesting in the holes in the harbour wall. The guillemots in particular were lovely little birds, always busy in the harbour waters. Why what are basically pelagic birds should stay so close to humans was a mystery. Everybody was very friendly and Nicola managed to acquire some very fresh mackerel from a fisherman against the promise of a date in the pub later (she stood him up!).

On Alex's recommendation, we went to Campbell's restaurant for dinner - and it was superb, by far the best meal of the cruise and excellent by any standards, with a lovely view out over the harbour entrance. After dinner, Nicola and the Skipper walked up on to the headland to the south of the town, along cliffs wild with the cries of seabirds to Dunskey Castle, a gaunt ruin looking out to sea. On the way we had noticed a rock cutting running parallel to the path and we walked down this on the way back. It had the feel of a railway cutting, very narrow, but with no obvious beginning or end; very strange. The lights of the town laid out below us looked lovely in the gathering dusk.

## **Wednesday 5th July 2017 - Portpatrick to Peel, Isle of Man**

At 1000 we moved over to water up alongside the fishing boat Predator while the crew members amused themselves watching the antics of the guillemots. The weather had improved considerably and it was deemed to be a shorts day! As is often the case, warm sunshine meant no wind and the log reports the wind speed as 0! There was nothing for it but to motor - and we motored all day across a glassy sea. The first part of the trip was along the coast of the Mull of Galloway, very green and well-cultivated and with a small and scattered population. As we left Crammag Head and said goodbye to Scotland, the Isle of Man appeared over the horizon, seemingly near but in fact tantalisingly far away.

Barrie took to the galley at lunchtime and we enjoyed Nicola's mackerel, pan-fried with bread and butter - delicious. We chugged on through the afternoon and by 1725, Peel was still 14 miles away. At this point, we saw what might have been 6-8 Orcas behaving very oddly but at some 5 cables distant, we couldn't confirm that was what they were.

We gradually approached the northern tip of the Isle of Man, a long flat finger which runs a long way out into the sea. The hills of the island were lovely in the late afternoon sunshine and by 1920 we were on a visitor's buoy outside Peel Harbour, admiring the magnificent Peel Castle and waiting for the flap gate to drop on the entrance to the harbour. At 2030 we had the all-clear to enter and 15 minutes later were moored in the marina. It had been a lot of motoring but also a lovely day with lots of interest.

Day's run 51.5nm, engine hours 9.2.

### **Thursday 6th/ Friday 7th July 2017 - Peel to Liverpool**

Sadly Barrie had to leave us in the early morning to fly back home as his wife was unwell. A look at the distance to Liverpool, our next port of call, and checking the tides suggested that the 90-mile passage would be better done at night, aiming to arrive at the Liverpool Marina at about 0830. This meant that we would have a day to explore Peel.

The Skipper had earlier made contact with Wendy Horn, the Little Ship Club's Honorary Port Officer for the Isle of Man, and she came aboard for coffee in the morning. Because of the times of the opening of the flap gate, it was necessary to catch the last bridge opening of the morning and at 1200 Mike and the Skipper moved Bagheera out to a visitor's buoy again, rowing back ashore in the dinghy and meeting up with Nicola and Wendy for an excellent - and very reasonable - seafood lunch in warm sunshine on the roof of the café on the fish quay. Wendy then took us on a tour of Peel, the first stop being at a smokery to buy kippers and then for a walk round the centre of Peel. As a town, it's like going back 100 years, a real time-warp, with most of the shops having their old style of shop-front and all sorts of goods and produce on sale, from Isle of Man TT memorabilia through to old-fashioned butchers. In a back street, Mike found his very own house - Gill Cottage - and a picture was taken to record the event. Wendy was very keen to show off the quality of Davidson's ice cream and we sat on the seafront and enjoyed our cones like true grockles - they were delicious.

At 1600, we said our goodbyes to Wendy and re-launched the dinghy, boarding the crew with some difficulty on the slippery rocks at low tide and returning to Bagheera.

We left Peel in the afternoon sunshine, filing a passage report with Holyhead Coastguard at 1700. It was a lovely evening as we motored down the varying coastline of the island, with some fine cliffs as well as verdant farmland. As the tide was in our favour, we decided to take the inshore passage through Calf Sound between Calf Island and the mainland, where the tide can run at up to 8 knots. We shot through it like a cork from a bottle, the overfalls only lasting for less than a cable - well worth the time saving.

At last a breeze filled in from the south-west and at 1917 the engine was killed as we settled down to a lovely night sail. The stars were out and we had the sea to ourselves. The Skipper was below off watch when he heard a squeak from Nicola, who had been given a fright by the sudden appearance of dolphins alongside the boat in the dark. Sadly, there was no phosphorescence to mark their trails but it was lovely just to hear them and see their shapes in the darkness.

By 0300, we were starting to pick up the lights of the many gas platforms that scatter the shallow waters of the bay and as dawn broke they were joined by the ghostly shapes of wind turbines. 0700 saw us in the buoyed channel that runs up the Mersey estuary; we cleared in with Mersey VTS but it was a quiet morning for shipping. The tide gradually strengthened as we came up past Hoylake and Mike spotted the many Anthony Gormley figures on the shoreline.

It was clear that we would be early and so with the tide rushing us up, the engine was just on tickover as we passed the "ferry 'cross the Mersey". The Liver and the Cunard Buildings were still impressive but sadly built all around with starkly modern architecture and a funfair which rather detracted from their elegance.

It was not until 1000 that we were able to enter Liverpool Marina, with its awkward dock entrance beset by fluctuating currents and a dockmaster whose scouse accent was so thick that it was very

difficult to understand him! Still, we had arrived and Objective No. 7 - our last - had been achieved and we called Holyhead Coastguard to report our safe arrival.

We found it a tatty marina, with poorly-maintained facilities, lots of dirt around it and a lack of well-trained staff. Check-in took half-an-hour, due to the Marina Manager insisting on answering every phone call himself, in spite of two other people in the office. Still, it was sheltered and we had power and water to keep us warm and clean!

It was a day of comings and goings; we said goodbye to Nicola who caught the train back to London and the Cowes Classics Week and welcomed Sylvia Chesters and Martin Sandford who arrived in the early afternoon. After settling in, Mike and Martin went off in search of stores while the Skipper and Sylvia entertained the Skipper's niece Ann and her two rather wild children.

Mike cooked an "inventive" supper of hot-smoked salmon from Peel with cous-cous, carrot and cheese as the new crew found their way round the boat.

Day's run 91.3nm, engine hours 5.2.

**Leg 4a cruise distance 299.9nm, engine hours 23.6.**

**Cumulative distance from Dartmouth 1322.9nm, engine hours 143.9.**

## **LEG 4B - LIVERPOOL TO DARTMOUTH**

### **Saturday 8th July 2017 - Liverpool to Conway**

It was a lovely morning and we were anxious to leave the marina. However, the senior crew member (by virtue of age) went AWOL and we missed the first lock out. At 1015 we were in the lock accompanied by an old nobby, a local sailing fishing boat, and a film crew who were doing a feature on old working boats. We tried to charge them royalties for the use of pictures of Bagheera but they weren't biting!

It was a long drag out against a foul tide but Liverpool looked much better in the bright sunshine. The river was busy with lots of shipping movements and we had to watch ourselves and listen carefully to Mersey VTS. It wasn't until we were almost clear of the dredged channel before we could sail and even then, the wind was only a light north-westerly. We slowly made our way westwards through the Gwynt y Moor wind farm, getting close up and personal with the giant turbines. This area seemed to be a huge mass of turbines, the biggest wind farms we had encountered and stretching as far as the eye could see.

Eventually we gave up sailing and it was engine on again. There was a wonderful view of Snowdonia unfolding as we approached Great Orme's Head, a spectacular headland with an hotel jutting out on a rocky bluff from its most exposed promontory. Once round the headland, we opened up Conway Bay and looked across to Anglesey - a fine sight. The hillsides were scarred with old mineral workings though which rather detracted from the immediate view.

Pilotage into Conway is complex and the myriad of buoys were often not where we expected them to be, their locations being changed as the silting of the estuary changes. Although the tide was on the rise, there are two areas in the entrance channel which dry out and we had to be careful, although in the end we always had at least a metre under the keel. Once inside, the water deepened and we could relax, admiring the view and the moored yachts while waiting for the



green light to enter Conway Marina. Eventually we were able to enter at 2035 and enjoyed a fine supper, eaten in the cockpit for the first time on the cruise as the sun went down in a golden haze.

Day's run 46.9nm, engine hours 6.4.

### **Sunday 9th July 2017 - Conway to Beaumaris**

It was very breezy in the morning although with poor visibility, giving the Skipper food for thought as to how he would extricate Bagheera from her berth. The crew were well-showered in what was the smartest marina we encountered on the whole cruise - what a change from Liverpool!

Most of the crew went ashore to walk to Conway, which we found absolutely lovely - we were unaware that it was a UNESCO World Heritage site. The only blot on the landscape (literally) was the town's library, a building of unbelievable ugliness built on top of part of the ancient fortifications. For an engineer, the old Brunel and Stephenson bridges were fascinating and although we didn't have time to visit the castle, it dominates the town magnificently. An exploration of the High Street uncovered quite the best cake shop one could imagine and fresh cream éclairs and vanilla slices of vast size were purchased for the crew but of general provisions, there were few - the only supermarket was devoid of chilled food as its chillers had broken down.

On the return to the marina, we called the Royal Anglesey Yacht Club's bo'sun and managed to secure a mooring for the night at Beaumaris. We left our berth dramatically at 1230; the general plan worked out to get the head through the wind by keeping on a stern spring to the last second was successful but by golly! It was a close thing. It was very rough in the approach channel and as it was only a short distance across to the top of the Menai Straits and with the wind on our nose, we decided to motor.

There are various approaches one can take to the Menai Straits and with the tide still fairly high and the seas moderating as we came into the lee of Anglesey, we were able to take a short cut across the Midlake Swatch and the anticipated minimum depth of 3.5m was just about right.

The scenery at the north end of the straits is lovely, with Puffin Island in the North and various castles and big houses to look at. As we approached Anglesey, there were dozens of dinghies out racing with lots of capsizes in the stiff breeze. We contacted Guy, the bo'sun, and were directed to a mooring for the night. Initially our attempts to pick it up were continually frustrated until we realised that the pick-up line and junk were well and truly twisted round the riser. A call to Guy and he came across, took the pick-up buoy in his hand and whizzed round and round the buoy in his dory until the line came free and we were able to moor safely.

It would have been nice to go ashore as Beaumaris looked lovely but the strong breeze and the fierce tide meant that it was not safe to use the dinghy. Guy had offered a trip ashore but never appeared and we had to settle for sitting in the cockpit and looking at the amazing view, with Snowdon spread out before us across the straits. It was truly a dramatic anchorage.

Day's run 13.6nm, engine hours 3.2.

### **Monday 10th/Tuesday 11th July - Beaumaris to Milford Haven**

As was often the case on this cruise, we started the day without knowing where we would finish it. The first challenge was to negotiate the Menai Straits, including the notorious Swellies - probably the most interesting passage of the whole cruise.

The advice was that we should arrive at the Swellies, which lie 4 miles from Beaumaris between the two bridges, at slack water (which was supposed to be at 1015) and in good visibility. We woke to low cloud and mist - very different from the previous night and not ideal for the trip. The tide was flooding south-west through the straits and we watched a couple of fishermen netting off the exposed sandbank opposite where we were moored but we couldn't see what they were fishing for or what success they had - the gulls were certainly interested!

At 0915 we left our lovely mooring and set off into the murk, which gradually lifted as we went along. There was plenty to see, with many communities along the straits. We passed Bangor Pier and round the corner the Menai Suspension Bridge bridge came into view but the tide was now running strongly against us - no sign of slack water yet. We pottered about for a while but eventually decided that it would be better to stem some tide and be in control rather than have tide under us. Although we had perused all the available information about the Swellies, none gave us what we wanted - clear information about the marks and leading lines. In the end it became obvious and keeping a wary eye on the bridge height (not all that much clearance) we crept past Swellies rock and picked up the leading line that took us inside Cribbin Rock and past the little island of Gored Goch with its charming but isolated Cottages. Under the old Britannia Bridge we sneaked and into safer waters. Phew! The log records "thanks to Mike the Navigator" for keeping an eye on the charts and the chartplotter.

There are many wonderful houses on the banks of the straits but none finer than Plas Newydd, the ancestral home of the Marquess of Anglesey, an elegant but vast country house designed in the 18th century by James Wyatt and set in glorious grounds. They knew how to live in style in those days! It was good to see a sailing and canoeing centre on the edge of the gardens with some Hawk dayboats, evidence that the National Trust is branching out?

There is a big watersports centre at Plas Menai and this was the next milestone as we approached the town of Caernarfon with its fine castle. At this point, the direction of buoyage changes and we had to change our mindset!

Once past the narrows at Abermenai Point, it felt as though we were in the open sea but Caernarfon bar proved interesting with a slalom course of buoyage, all in completely different positions to the charts or the chartplotter, evidence of how rapidly the bar changes. Happily, as we cleared the Fairway Buoy a light breeze came up and we were able to sail for a while as we crossed Caernarfon Bay past the Lleyn Peninsula.

As Bardsey Island approached, we had a decision to make; turn east and head up to either Abersoch or Pwllheli or carry on across Cardigan Bay to Milford Haven? We decided that with Sylvia's time constraint (she needed to be able to catch a train to Iceland (!) on Saturday) we needed to cover the miles while we had a benign forecast for the exposed 80 mile crossing of Cardigan Bay, even if it was clear that we faced a lot of motoring.

By 1445 we were motoring again on a flat sea. Bardsey Island came abeam at 1625 and a passage report was logged with Holyhead Coastguard - the Skipper's normal practice for a night passage. The breeze came up again and we had our first definitive sighting of 3 sharks.

As the evening wore on, the log reports the frustration of the wind coming and going, engine off and engine on, the tedium relieved by Mike's smoked salmon and leek pasta to fortify us for the night. We needed it; in the early hours of the morning, the wind came in from the south-west, initially with just enough west in it to let us sail, but with wind over tide it became unpleasantly rough and the motion made sleep difficult. Added to that, it started to rain.....

By the time the South Bishop light came abeam, the wind had backed round into the south-south-west and we could no longer anywhere near lay our course and so had to motor-sail for the last couple of hours into Milford Haven. We obtained clearance from Port Control and entered the blessed calm waters of Dale and after reporting our safe arrival to Holyhead, moored alongside the pontoon for breakfast. The Skipper would have been happy to stay and sleep but the crew was now insistent on hot showers and we donned wet weather gear again and motored hard up the harbour, just catching the last locking-in at Milford Haven Marina at 1154.

It was an interesting place, a likeable mixture of a leisure marina and a commercial harbour, with friendly staff and good facilities. Lunch went by the board as the crew went their separate ways - some to shower, some to sleep, some to explore and some to shop. The afternoon passed quickly and the big decision was then where to eat? The main criteria were the availability of Doom Bar (Martin), the menu (Mike), a warm, dry, comfortable place with nice wine (Sylvia) and not the best view in town (the Skipper)! After exploring all the options, we enjoyed a good meal in Martha's Vineyard over the marina office, which ticked all the boxes. We all slept well.

Day's run 131.1nm, engine hours 22.1 (too many).

### **Wednesday 12th/Thursday 13th July 2017 - Milford Haven to Falmouth**

it was a lovely morning and the Skipper's shorts got an airing! With the 72-hour forecast still benign but with the promise of stronger winds to come, we faced up to another 100 mile passage across the mouth of the Bristol Channel to the Longships and then on round Land's End to Falmouth. The wind was forecast to go variable, then north-west, then backing round into the south later and so the plan was to make as much westing as we reasonably could in anticipation of the backing to come. We couldn't make much sense of the tides as they follow a strange pattern but it seemed that it would be favourable for the morning and so we locked out at 1000 and headed back out to sea.

Once past the oil jetties, the estuary was lovely in the warm sunshine and we had a good sail out to the Sheep Rock buoy, making another passage report as we went. Here we were accosted by the range safety boat for the range just south of Milford Haven but on hearing of our intended course, he was reassured that we would not interrupt range operations and wished us good passage.

At around midday, we were joined by a large school (pod?) of dolphins who stayed with us for the best part of an hour. At one stage, more than a dozen of them were riding our bow-wave, tightly packed in close formation, while the rest performed aerobatics for us - Martin managing the difficult feat of photographing one in mid-leap. It was quite magical.

After lunch, we established the relaxed watch pattern of 2 hours on, 6 off - the luxury that can be afforded with an experienced crew of four. The day continued to be warm and sunny as we passed Lundy in the distance in the late afternoon. At supper-time, we were joined by yet more dolphins and this leg provided by far the most sightings of the cruise.

It was a beautiful night after a wonderful sunset but the wind came and went, with alternate periods of sailing and motoring. In the end, we made too much westing and had to bear away sharply to avoid being drawn into the shipping lanes off Land's End. At the Runnel Stone, the tide was foul and we were only making less than 3 knots over the ground for a time. Still, we slowly weathered Land's End and crossed Mount's Bay towards the Lizard, suddenly seeing more yachts than we had seen at any point in the cruise. Even with the light southerly wind we now had, the

race off the Lizard was uncomfortable and we were pleased to be able to ease sheets, kill the engine and run up towards Falmouth.

At 1430, we passed the Manacles Buoy and set our course towards the entrance to Falmouth Harbour, with the welcome sight of St. Anthony Head lighthouse standing out in the sunshine. From the south it is a great landmark but from the east, it is invisible until you reach it! It is difficult to see why it was not set higher on the headland.

As we passed Pendennis Point we reported our safe arrival with Falmouth Coastguard - they were so near we could just about have shouted it - and at 1715 were moored in a crowded Falmouth Yacht Haven alongside a friendly and helpful German yacht.

It was a strange feeling to be back in familiar waters. Since leaving Corpach, Bagheera had never previously been to any of the places we had visited. Equally, it felt good to have passed the last challenging passage of the cruise.

The Skipper was anxious to buy the crew a pint in the Chain Locker pub, one of the great sailing pubs - but disaster, it is being "refurbished"! All that smoke-stained charm will be lost forever and it will become just another brasserie. Still, we managed to find a pint of Doom Bar in a lesser establishment and then returned to Bagheera for what was one of the Skipper's better toad-in-the-holes for supper.

Day's run 166.3nm, engine hours 25.0 (*far* too many!).

#### **Friday 14th July 2017 - Bastille Day - Falmouth to Fowey**

After breakfast, the Skipper walked up to Falmouth Town station with Sylvia who left for Iceland. We were going to fill up with diesel but after hanging around for 20 minutes, the Pilot launch was still taking aboard a vast quantity of fuel and we decided to get it somewhere else.

Our German friends followed us out on their way to Plymouth and although the sunshine had deserted us again, we enjoyed a rollicking sail on a broad reach past Nare Head and out to the Dodman, which we reached at 1215. Gwineas Rock came up at 1252 and we bore away for Fowey across the mouth of St. Austell Bay. By 1430, we were moored in a deserted Fowey - we had a choice of perhaps 20 moorings and chose one in good company with Captain's Lady, a Rustler 42 known to both Mike and the Skipper, and a Rustler 36 similar to the Skipper's last boat, Segura II.

The sun re-emerged and it was lovely just to sit and look; Fowey on a fine summer's day is one of the most attractive harbours in England. We decided to have a last dinner ashore and went to the Royal Fowey Yacht Club, having a great meal on the verandah while the Fowey Class dinghies raced (well, crawled around a course) below us in the now-feeble breeze. Just to liven up the proceedings, a china clay carrier came in on the tide and soon afterwards the lifeboat went out on a shout to a motor boat in trouble off Pentewan Sands. It was a memorable evening.

Day's run 23.9nm, engine hours 0.6 - Hooray!

#### **Saturday 15th July 2017 - Fowey to Salcombe**

The crew was despatched ashore for an early morning trip to the Quay Bakery for croissants and whatever and after breakfast, we motored up to the new fuel pontoon above Berrill's Yard to diesel up. This turned out to good news on two counts - the price of diesel was only 80p per litre as opposed to nearer £1.20 and we had only used 97 litres since filling up in Corpach - an average consumption of only 1.2 litres per hour!

At 0915 we left the pontoon in high spirits to find a light westerly breeze outside - not a great sail like the day before but still enough to move us along at a respectable speed. Polperro was passed at 1030 and we slogged our way across Whitsand Bay, a long boring passage, as the wind steadily increased. By Rame Head it was up to Force 4/5, still from the west, and we raced across Bigbury Bay at 6-7 knots with the last of the east-going tide.

By the time we reached Bolt Tail it had turned and the last few miles to Bolt Head were very bumpy as they always are with any strong wind out of the south and west along this stretch of coastline, where the waves reflect off the long headland. Still, it was another great sail but we were pleased to turn into the lee of Bolt Head and once over the bar, the sea went down as if by magic. It was getting towards low water as we crossed the bar but by keeping to the west of the leading line, there was plenty of water.

Martin had never been to Salcombe and was keen to go ashore and so we rafted up alongside a Westerly Typhoon on one of the visitor's buoys off the town. With the last of the ebb still running and a strong breeze blowing up the estuary, it was very bumpy until the tide turned. The log records that we had "an evening of moderate alcoholism", starting with drinks with the crew of Papaver, our neighbours, who proved to be an interesting bunch with a fund of anecdotes.

Day's run 39.5nm, engine hours 1.2.

### **Sunday 16th July - the home run - Salcombe to Dartmouth**

At 0915, with a rather strange feeling of the end of something great, we left the buoy and motored up round the Bag to give Martin a view of the better part of Salcombe. We passed over the Bar at 1000, this time with plenty of water as it was over half-tide. The wind was light from the west and although we managed to sail out to Prawle Point, we were just slopping around and had to motor out to Start Point. Here the wind filled in again and we had a lovely sail across Start Bay as the sun came out again for our homecoming.

The Homestone, the point of arrival, was reached at 1222 and at 1300 we were moored in our berth, not before having to get Ron to move his dinghy out of the way first. It was all over - the log records "The End"!

But it wasn't quite the end; Martin departed after lunch to catch the steam train to Paignton and then on home and Mike and the Skipper set to tidy and clean the boat after such a long cruise. The decks were scrubbed, the cabin sole washed, stores were checked and everything generally put in order for the next sail. After all the work, we enjoyed a scratch supper in the cockpit and watched the sun go down over the naval college.

Day's run 17.0nm, engine hours 1.7.

**Leg 4B cruise distance 438.3nm, engine hours 60.2**

**Cumulative since leaving Dartmouth 1761.2nm, engine hours 204.1.**

### **Monday 17th July 2017 - Home!**

It was still a busy morning, finishing off all the jobs that had to be done and sorting out all the charts that wouldn't be used again for a long time. Diana arrived at about 1100 and the Skipper went ashore to collect her and buy a new gas cylinder. It was hot again and we enjoyed lunch in the cockpit before heading off home, dropping Mike at Newton Abbot station on the way.

It had been a highly satisfying cruise, with all the interim objectives achieved. We set out on the 15th May and arrived back on the 16th July - almost exactly the dates established at the beginning of all the planning. We had visited 40 anchorages and marinas, 28 of which were new to the Skipper and to most of the crew, and negotiated 41 locks. We had covered 1761.2 miles, the only pity being that we had had to use the engine for 204.1 hours, perhaps 1000 miles of the trip, and made 36 passages at an average of just under 50 miles each. As for the weather, the main thing was that the only days when we could not have sailed were lay-days anyway and so we never lost a day. Yes, there was a fair amount of rain, particularly on Leg 1 and it had been colder than we had expected but hey, it was the North Sea and Scotland!

Thanks are due to the great people who made it happen:

Leg 1 - Nigel Hayler, Don Walker and Mike Wrigley

Leg 2A - Mike Gill, Shaun Nesbitt and John Yates

Leg 2B - Mike Gill, Shaun Nesbitt and Pat Duval

Leg 3 - Mike Gill, Ann Armstrong and Diana Clements

Leg 4A - Mike Gill, Nicola De Quincey and Barrie Martin

Leg 4B - Mike Gill, Sylvia Chesters and Martin Sandford

Special thanks are due to Mike Gill, whose wholehearted support for my ventures has been instrumental in making them happen.

## **WHERE NEXT?**

**David Clements (57-62)**

7 August 2017