

Adventure to the Firth of Clyde – Nick Clark & Maxine Smith

In May 2023 we set off with our Shrimper 19 *Phyllis* (848) to the Firth of Clyde for a 2-week trip. *Phyllis* had been kept in a barn since late 2019 as we had accidentally bought a Crabber 26 and had been sailing her since. Two boats might seem greedy, but the plan is to use *Phyllis* as an ‘adventure boat’, trailing her to various places, and the Crabber 26 as the luxury weekend retreat!

We had done some research on the Firth of Clyde area (using past *Shrimper* magazines and the relevant Imray guide) but we couldn’t make any concrete plans for where and when as we had no idea what the weather was going to throw at us. We’d chosen early May as the time to go as the midges aren’t in full attack mode and also that’s when we weren’t doing something else.

Our base had to be somewhere we could still ‘have a holiday’ in case gales blew every day, so we chose Largs Yachthaven, which has loads of facilities (chandlers, café, restaurant, workshops, nearby petrol station, just off an A road, no tiny lanes, laundry, showers, washing up facilities, etc.). Although the marina has a slipway, we decided to treat ourselves to a lift in and out as that meant we didn’t need to take the launching box (waders, ropes, launching ramp thing, etc.) and we didn’t need to wait for sufficient launching water.



Our starting point at Largs Marina

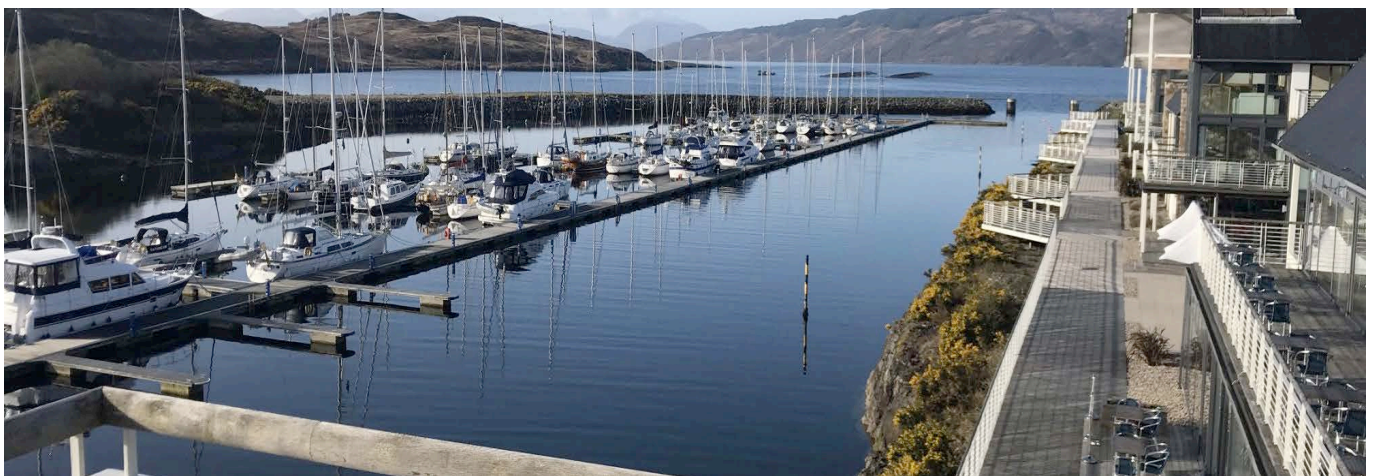
In case we couldn’t easily get to a shop, we packed sufficient meals (mostly porridge, noodles, Spice Tailor curry kits and tinned veg), milk, cheese, fruit, wine in a box, a 10 litre water bag plus a few bottles of water, and brought along a couple of Thermos cold bags plus a very small fridge-freezer. We also brought along an electricity cable so that when we stayed in a marina we could freeze down the cold packs overnight.

Adventure to the Firth of Clyde – Nick Clark & Maxine Smith

We arrived at Largs at 0100 on Friday 5th May. Fortunately, the marina is open 24 hours and a very nice night-watchman directed us to where we could set up. Amazingly, we remembered how to rig her and got lifted in Sunday lunchtime. There was some biting of finger nails as the Yanmar 1GM engine hadn't been started in 3.5 years. We were mightily relieved when it started first time.

We set off out of the marina on the Monday morning in the drizzle (which didn't last long). There was a light southerly wind so we turned to starboard and headed up towards the eastern Kyle of Bute (dodging a ferry and a naval ship on the way). The only bit of planning we did was to know when we could go through where the two Kyles meet as it is tidal. We got through from the eastern to the western Kyle and anchored in Wreck Bay, which is on the Bute side, for the night. There's a brick BBQ and an eco toilet on the nearby shore.

Although it was tempting to stay longer, we decided to head for Portavadie. The wind is a bit fluky in the Kyles and lochs so we had to do a bit of motoring. Inside Portavadie 'marina' there was loads of space for visitors so we could take our pick of the berths. Top tip: if you arrive after office hours you may not be able to get any electricity unless you are lucky enough to find a meter with credit on it and your lead reaches that far. They had nice showers, but Portavadie is more of a health resort than a marina. During our stay a local chap came over to speak to us and admire the Shrimper. We also met the crew of a 'large white yacht' which had left Largs the same time as us: some of them were very interested in our trip with the Shrimper and started to realise that you don't need a massive white yacht to go exploring in this area.



Photograph courtesy of Portavadie Marina

Adventure to the Firth of Clyde – Nick Clark & Maxine Smith

We set off the following day for Lochranza on the northern tip of Arran, although some tacking was required as we approached Arran due to the southerly breeze and the wind coming down off the nearby mountains. There are 12 visitor buoys and a community-owned pontoon on to which you can leave your tender. We spent 2 nights there as there's plenty to do within easy walking distance and there's also the most amazing café (The Sandwich Station) at the ferry terminal (which doubled as our local toilet facilities although there is a community-owned toilet block). During the second evening a local chap was very interested in the Shrimper. He also had a small gaff-rigged boat that he kept in what's known as The Puddle. He said we'd be welcome to tie up to him if needs be.



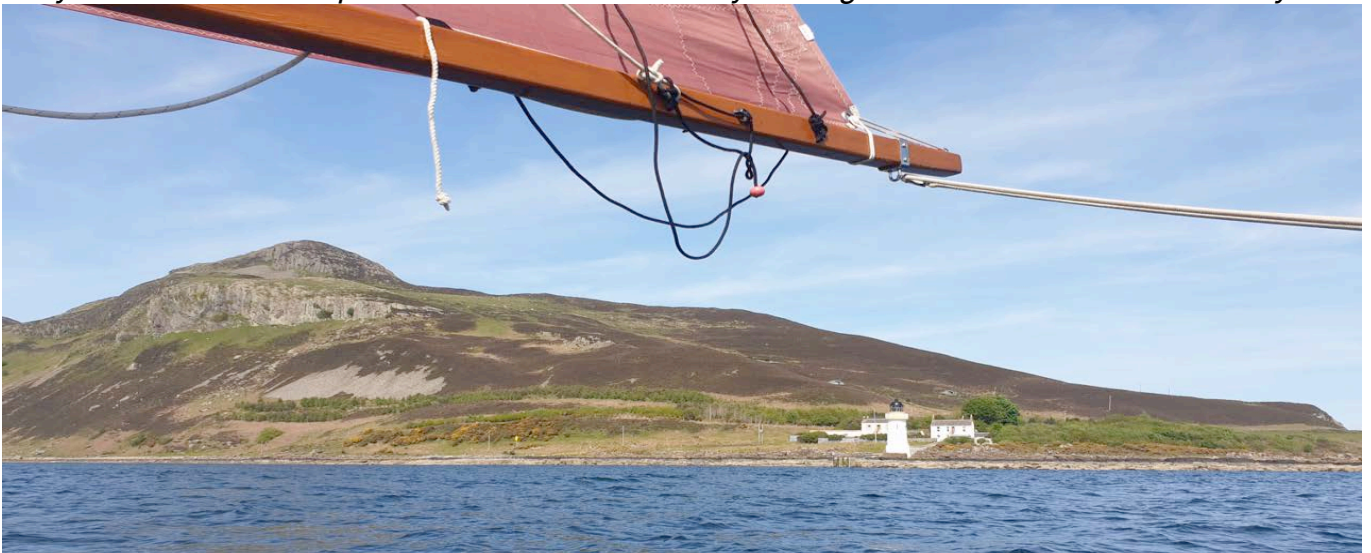
Looking north from our mooring at Lochranza on Arran

Adventure to the Firth of Clyde – Nick Clark & Maxine Smith

The next day we made use of the gentle northerly and had a lovely run to Campbeltown, which is close to the southern tip of the Mull of Kintyre (as in the song). The marina is small but has good facilities and the chap who greets you is very helpful. The showers were good and there's a Tesco in town, which was fortunate as I'd underestimated how much wine we would drink.



Phyllis berthed at Campbeltown on the Mull of Kintyre & Lighthouse on Lamlash near Holy Isle



Next morning we headed for Lamlash on the eastern side of Arran. It was thick fog (Paul McCartney's famous 'mist'), which was a bit concerning as we had to cross a shipping channel and it was quite hard work keeping a good lookout for other boats. It was a bit of a shame that it was foggy that day as we were 'quite close' to Ailsa Craig. Oh well, we'll have to come back! Lamlash is situated in a lovely bay, which is somewhat protected from easterlies by Holy Isle. There are a few visitor buoys and anchorages. If you use the buoys then you need to get ashore and pay the chap in the shed **in cash!**

Adventure to the Firth of Clyde – Nick Clark & Maxine Smith

The following morning we sailed for Tarbert. We knew that by the time we reached the top of Arran there would be a strong northerly, so there were many hours of tacking that day. Another top tip: there are quite a few ferries in the Firth of Clyde area and they move quite fast so it pays to know which way the nearest ferry is heading at all times! Tarbert is a lovely town with all mod cons and has a nice marina with good facilities. We spent 2 nights there, as we liked it so much.



Royal Tarbert Castle overlooking our berth in Tarbert Marina



Adventure to the Firth of Clyde – Nick Clark & Maxine Smith

After Tarbert we sailed to Kames, which is near the top of the western Kyle. You can anchor near the shore although there are a few buoys that belong to a hotel which are free for the night if you pop in for a drink. We popped in for a fantastic meal and bottle of wine so it ended up being a very expensive buoy.



View from our mooring at Kames

The next day we headed towards the south of Bute. There was some discussion as to where we'd be anchoring that night but we went for Glencallum Bay on the south-east tip of Bute next to the Rubh' an Eun Lighthouse. It was a lovely bay with great views of Arran but cooking dinner demanded attention as the contents of the frying pan rocked from side to side. Fortunately, nothing got spilled and the rocking eventually subsided and we had a peaceful night.

It was now Thursday 18 May and we had to sail back to Largs, taking the interesting route between the Cumbraes, as our lift-out was booked for the Friday. We managed to de-rig her in time to get back on the road for home on the Sunday. We may have been lucky with the weather, but this trip far exceeded our expectations in that we sailed just under 200 nm. We enjoyed it so much we plan to go again next year.

Adventure to the Firth of Clyde – Nick Clark & Maxine Smith

