

Around the Isle of Skye – Roy Harper

Sadly, I have no Welsh flotilla cruises to report for 2008. However, I did realise a long-time ambition to sail solo around the Isle of Skye.

I allowed two and a half weeks, and set out on the 750-mile journey from Newport Pems in mid-June. Having launched on the beach (Ardvasar in the sound of Sleat), I then spent the next four days lying at a mooring in harbour waiting for the rain and strong winds to abate - as well as the Coastguards to finish their strike!



Lady Eleanor enjoys the West Coast of Skye

I finally set off in a force four south-westerly and had a cracking 18-mile sail to the Isle of Soay, where I entered a beautiful peaceful loch over a drying bar. I slept soundly after supper on board and, as the weather was changeable, listened to the 05.00 coastguard forecast.

A force 8 gale was due in 24hrs, so I set sail for the safe haven of Loch Harport 18 miles to the north. I anchored in 4 metres of water, 100m from the shore opposite the Talisker Distillery and the local pub. It is no good getting older if you don't get wiser! I managed to row ashore for a meal that evening in my one-man tender, but then spent the next three days and nights on board, being buffeted by the storm.

By this time I had abandoned my plan to circumnavigate the island and set sail back down south at the first break in the weather, in a moderate north-westerly, heading for Loch Scavaig. The entrance to the loch was tricky, but Martyn Lawrence's Pilot gave detailed directions avoiding the many off-lying rocks. I dropped my anchor in 3m of water alongside a solitary 40 footer named *Black Badger*, whose crew was ashore climbing the nearby Cullin Mountains.

Taking advantage of the first sunshine I had encountered for days, I rowed ashore, took a photograph, and climbed up to Loch Coruisk. There I took a brace of superbly marked brown trout with my fly rod, providing a delicious supper.

That evening the weather forecast warned of force 10 gales for the Inner Hebrides, and this was late June! The skipper of *Black Badger* decided to run for the shelter of the Isle of Canna, and as there was no phone signal he agreed to get a message to my wife Eleanor as soon as possible, explaining that I was safe, but would be out of contact for a few days. I laid out all of my 40 metres of anchor chain, and then stayed on board for the next 5 days and nights.

My masthead radio aerial provided a strong enough signal to receive Stornoway Coastguard, and I had wired in a splitter that gives me a good FM radio signal. I now recount a humorous episode that I heard on Radio Skye, when Miss McPherson was being interviewed on her 104th birthday.

Reporter: "Tell me Miss M, what is the secret of your longevity?"

Miss M: "A wee dram or two every day, and I've never had a day's illness."

Reporter (incredulously): "You're 104 and never been bedridden?"

Miss M (indignantly): "Och, don't be silly young man, of course I have - hundreds of times - and twice on the ferry!"

Loch Scavaig is described in the Pilot as the most spectacular anchorage on the west coast, and I had plenty of time to admire it between the periods of rain, accompanied only by the seals on the rocks, the red deer on the hillsides, and the gannets diving for mackerel around me.



Lady Eleanor at anchor – Loch Scavaig

The storm calmed on Friday 27th June, so I set sail at 04.00 for Ardvasar, picked up my car and trailer, and set off on the two-day journey home, disappointed at the trip but full of admiration for the Shrimper. She really is the ideal boat for coastal hopping, and having dispensed with the second berth cushion on *Lady Eleanor*, replacing it with a "welsh dresser" to house all my stuff, I find her remarkably comfy for solo sailing.

Roy Harper – *Lady Eleanor* (921)

Editor's Note: Scotland is not always like this! The Firth of Clyde, which is proposed for Shrimper Week in 2010 (see p. 14), is more than 100 miles south of Skye and enjoys very sheltered sailing waters and a more benign microclimate influenced directly by the Gulf Stream. Skye, on the other hand, is very exposed to the Atlantic.