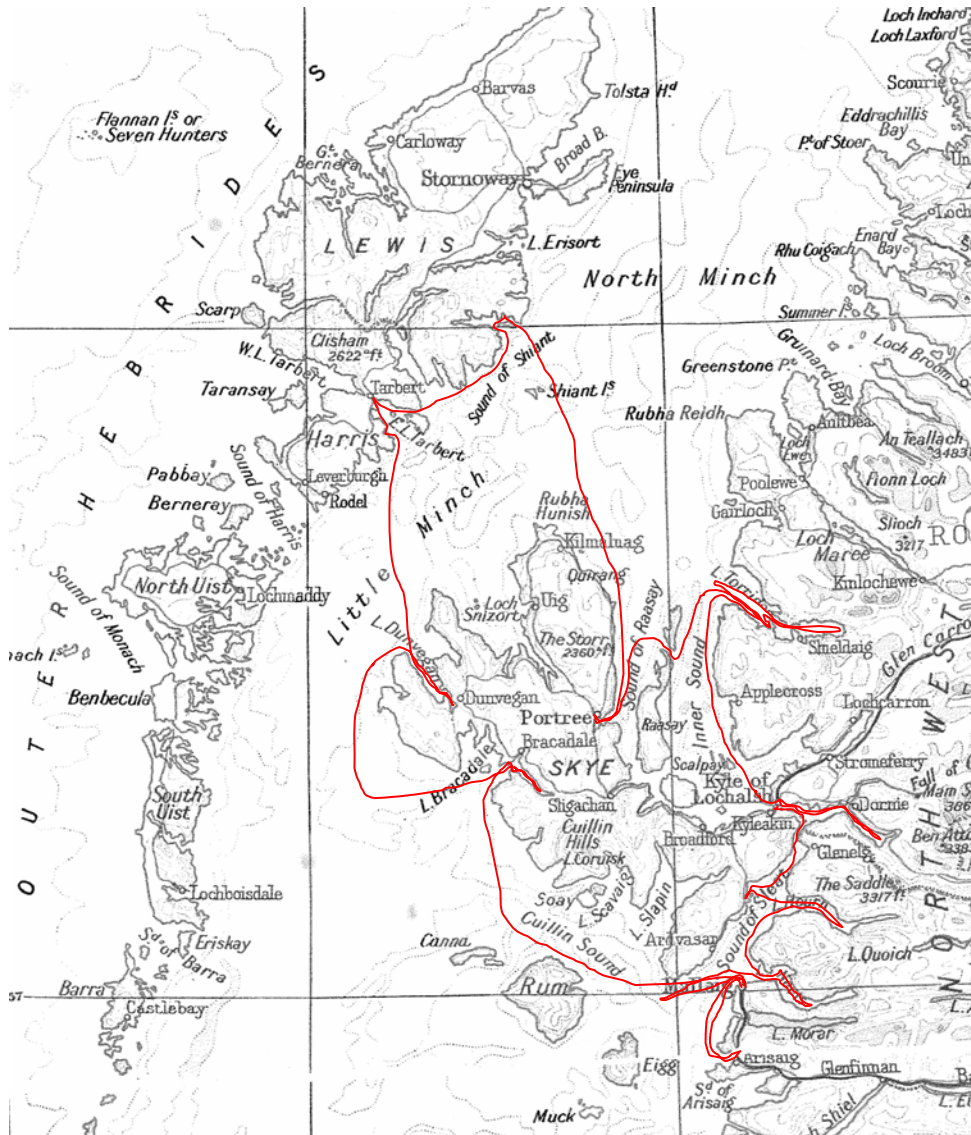


Bumbling in Scotland
Outer Hebrides and Skye
by
Gillie and Robin Whittle

22nd May - 13th June 2003



“Bumble Chugger” and our four wheel trailer needed a good check over before braving the currently gale lashed West Coast of Scotland. Inevitably the wheel bearings, brakes and brake cables needed attention. A very messy operation but we have found it to be quite essential. The first year the garage did it, but we decided the expense was too much for us, so after finding a trailer centre that could provide all the parts we have carried out the work ourselves since then.

The weather forecasts were distinctly bad for the few weeks leading up to the trip. Just in case we were to get good weather we embarked on a course of Marmite, which one of the magazines had said will keep the mosquitoes at bay.

Our 9 o'clock start on Thursday morning (22 May) was a bit optimistic, and it was another three quarters of an hour before we were finally packed up and the door locked. A quick 'goodbye' to Mr and Mrs Robin, who were hovering around the back door as usual, and we were off. We felt we knew the road to Oxford quite well, having been along it the two previous weekends. On the high ground before dropping down to the Oxford valley, we saw five or six large red kites circling and wheeling. We had seen them on our previous trips and had been surprised to learn from our bird book that their whereabouts was recorded.

Our journey northwards went smoothly: a bit slow around Birmingham, and very low cloud as we passed the Lakes, so no fine views. Just as well, or we would have wanted to divert! We had planned to stop for the night just north of Carlisle, but we had done so well with no mishaps to the trailer, that we decided to carry on and get through Glasgow.

The rain had been with us most of the day, and we approached a very wet and misty Loch Lomond about 8 o'clock, on the lookout for a friendly pub for a meal. We eventually found a place called 'Castle Lodges', which turned out to be a very superior caravan site, with smart wooden chalets replacing the caravans, all set in pleasant wooded grounds with an abundance of flowering rhododendrons. Hidden away amongst these, overlooking the loch, was The Cruin Bar and Restaurant. It proved to be a very pleasant place. They had no tables free for half an hour, so we had drinks at the bar. Rob disliked their John Smith beer, very different to the English version, but he enjoyed the McEwens. We chatted to the barman, and when he heard we were heading for Mallaig he exclaimed - What had we done to be so lucky as to be going there?; it was a bit of heaven, Scotland's Garden of Eden he ran out of superlatives! He was particularly referring to Arisaig and Morar and their silver sand beaches.

We enjoyed a good meal. Everything was rather slanted at the English and American tourist, with dishes named after Prince Charles and Diana, with flowery descriptions of the ingredients, and tinned bagpipe music in the background. While we were having supper, the rain and mist cleared away, and the clouds and evening light were quite beautiful over Loch Lomond. Our one complaint was that the restaurant had been designed with lovely big windows, but there was a horizontal bar which was just at eye level when sitting at ones table, and it totally disrupted the view. The next door table were celebrating 'Billy's' 30th birthday - Mum and Dad, wife, children, siblings. There were balloons and a funny cake, but it was a very sober party.

We were tempted to stay the night in the car park overlooking the loch, but decided we'd better not and moved out of the 'Castle Lodges' grounds. In fact the driveway led us out onto a road running along the side of the lake, parallel to the main road, so this was an ideal spot with a view. We sorted out the cabin, watched a heron doing an ungainly landing on the grass next to us, and settled down for the night.

It rained a lot in the night, but it was clearing by the time we left after breakfast. Another long drive: good roads to the end of Loch Lomond, then it became twisting and narrow, so becoming a rather tedious drive. Better through Glen Coe, though the clouds were lurking still on the mountains, and we didn't catch sight of Ben Nevis. We stopped at Glencoe village and had a wander. Nothing very noteworthy apart from the museum with its roof thatched with heather. Mrs MacPherson had advertised herself as open for coffee on the main road, but we found her closed, so after a coffee at the hotel, we continued on our way with the roads becoming ever more winding, and much of it single lane with passing places. About 15 miles from Mallaig we came upon huge roadworks and a big sign announcing "Trunk Road to Mallaig being constructed". It seemed totally incongruous at

the time, but when we saw the huge lorries being loaded up with fish at Mallaig (much of which was to be flown to Spain), we could understand the need for it.

Meanwhile, we continued on the picturesque route around Loch Leven and to the coast, with the railway line running beside us and criss-crossing us over slender stone bridges. The sun was shining by now and at Arisaig we stopped in one of the bays, and had lunch overlooking the silver sands and rocky reefs - it had a feel of the south coast of Brittany about it. It was very pleasant with swallows swooping around, and there were little brown sparrow-like birds on the beach visiting their nest in the long grass at the edge. A golf course the other side of the road must have been very testing for the players, with steep hillocks and valleys and a generous covering of colourful yellow gorse bushes.

Last leg of the journey to Mallaig. A pleasant place, very much a working fishing town, and it was good to see the fishing boats coming and going, and the harbour packed with about 25 of them, all being hosed down and fish boxes being lifted to shore. We parked near the Skye Ferry terminal and went in search of the Harbour Master, James MacLean. He was not in his office but we were given information on three possible slipways, and we wandered through the town to investigate.



The first was quite a steep concrete ramp with a very sharp, almost right angle, turn half way down; the second, again concrete, was very steep but possible; the third was rough stone with not good grip for the car. It was low tide, as we thought, with none of the ramps usable, so Rob went back to fetch the boat and bring it through the town to an empty parking area along the edge of the water, where we could get the boat rigged while waiting for the water to rise. On his journey, Rob met up with the Harbour Master, who was friendly and helpful and suggested the boat could be craned into the water. Rob declined and we got on with rigging.

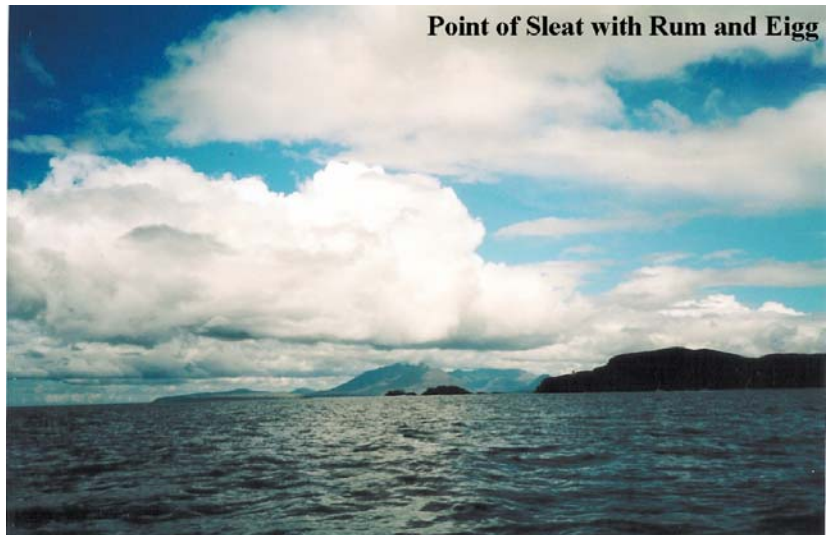
We were ready about 5 and were a bit upset to find the water was still going down. A check of the tide tables showed we weren't going to be able to launch until one in the morning. Rob did a quick dash back to the harbour to see if we could be craned in, but everything was closing down, though we could be lifted in at 8.30 the next day. So decision made, we went for a drink in 'The Mariners', and returned to "Bumble Chugger" for the night. As we climbed aboard my telephone started ringing in my handbag. This was rather a surprise as it should have been turned off: it must have been sat on at some stage. There was some urgent scuffling to the bottom of my large hold-all bag, and found it was a message from Lucy, our daughter. She said she'd heard of a good pub at Inverie on Loch Nevis - only accessible by water or over the mountains of Knoydart. She thought we might be interested, and we assumed that she and her friends, who were climbing on Knoydart over the weekend, would try to get there.

Eggs and bacon, and a Scrabble challenge, listening to the comments of passers by. Two young girls peered through the porthole, and jumped back with shrieks when they saw the boat was inhabited!

Saturday, 24 May. First of our dawn calls at 5.30 am: the radio set for the shipping forecast preceded by stirring music - Coates' medley. Definite groan time, though I must admit there were a few mornings during the holiday when I slept right through it.

We were up in good time and back down to the harbour. We found the crane driver, Hugh Cameron, who was very helpful and said he'd get "Bumble Chugger" in as soon as he'd done one other job. This was the first time "Bumble Chugger" had been lifted in and it all went very smoothly, though it was a traumatic exercise for Rob. We were put into a fairly empty harbour separated from the fishing fleet, where we tied onto a huge floating dock. We parked the car and trailer in the car park on the outskirts of town, and returned to the newsagent for the Daily Telegraph which was due to arrive on the 9.45 train. We were a little early and sheltered from a fierce squall in a nearby portakabin bookshop, enquiring about Neil Gunn's book "Off in a Boat" which had been recommended to us.

At last it was time to set off. A final check round the boat, and we cast off and chugged out through the harbour entrance. Sails set, we crossed the Sound of Sleat and headed for the Point of Sleat on Skye. Eigg and Rhum were shrouded in cloud, but they cleared as we neared them, and as we rounded the Point the Cuillins were lit up by sunlight, and looking spectacular. Back across the Sound, seeing the first of many seals that popped their heads up near us, and many guillemots, and sailed into Loch Nevis welcomed by the statue of a woman with outstretched arms on a high rock. Beautiful mountains surrounded us, and on our left we imagined Lucy and party climbing on Knoydart.



We continued to the end of the Loch passing several fish farms. As on all of the lochs, there were occasional isolated houses along the shore with no visible means of approach except steep tracks up the mountains or by water. There were surprisingly few sheep grazing on the hillsides. Near the head of the Loch at Tarbert, there was a very large isolated house in the process of being built or renovated, and at another spot there was a little house with a Union Jack flying, with 15 or 20 dinghies lined up on the grass, and a curious and very large whale-shaped houseboat on the beach. We heard later it was owned by John Ridgway, the Atlantic rower, and also that many rich and well-known personalities had properties in the area.

We retraced our way back down the Loch, tacking in quite a strong wind. At Inverie we picked up an empty buoy, and had a drink and sausage supper before preparing to row ashore to 'The Old Forge', which had looked very pleasant with drinkers outside in the evening sun. When we were only a few yards on our way, a largish motor boat came out from the pier, and we were informed by a very friendly man that we were on his mooring but we were very welcome to tie up to his stern. We rowed ashore together, and during a brief chat we learned that he now lived in Inverie having

moved from the Barbican in London. A new jetty was due to be built, funded by the EC. He offered us the use of his mooring on the far side of the bay if the weather blew up in the night.

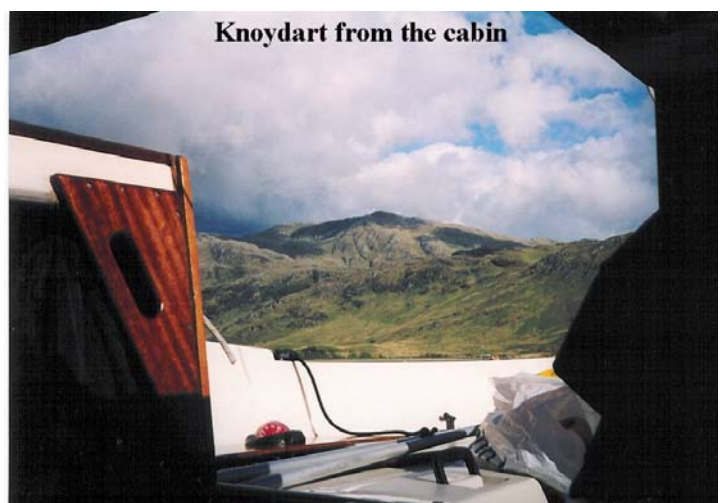
Inverie has a very beautiful setting on a bay off Loch Nevis. It is a very isolated community on a road that runs a few miles along the coast but has no connection with any other road system, so again access is over the Knoydart mountains or by sea. The pub is advertised as the remotest pub in the country. Inside it was warm and friendly and buzzing with people. We had a malt whisky each, - 'Old Pulteney', recommended by the



barman, produced in the most northerly distillery at John o' Groats, which is where he came from. It was very good but we were rather taken aback by the price, and we sipped our drinks very slowly, watching the fine view with the setting sun colouring the clouds. We left a note for Lucy with the barman in case their party did get to the pub. The wind had died and it was very still as we settled for the night on board, but after a while we were disturbed by the noise of our bowsprit bumping the motor boat. Rob braved the cold night air in a state of undress and moored us alongside the bigger boat. He got back to bed, but decided quite soon that this arrangement was not going to work, so we both got up and dressed, and chugged gently across the dark bay to an vacant mooring, enjoying the excuse to turn on our navigation lights!

Sunday morning (25 May) was very wet, and we didn't bestir ourselves too early. We motored down Loch Nevis with very little wind, though the rain eased for a while, and a fat band of a rainbow draped itself over a dip in the Knoydart mountains. We passed a very segregated small island, with one half white settled by gulls and the other half occupied by cormorants, and back out past the welcoming lady. The wind picked up and we sailed up a very wet Sound of Sleat and into Loch Hourn, which is said to be the most beautiful of the lochs, but the clouds were down and hiding the tops of the surrounding mountains.

The Knoydart peninsular was now to the south of us, and we kept our eyes open for the climbers. A wet, unpleasant day for them, but probably warmer for them on the move. It was definitely cold on the boat. Again very isolated scattered houses and communities along the shores. The mainland coast was not so well sheltered from the wind, so we crossed the short distance to Isleornsay on Skye, into a bay behind some sheltering rocks. At the head of the bay we picked up a mooring near some fishing boats and a couple of anchored yachts. The rain had cleared,



and we rowed ashore and managed a tricky manoeuvre up the steps at the side of a stone jetty. Isleornsay consisted of a large hotel and a scattering of houses. We'd hoped to get some provisions at the shop mentioned in the Pilot guide, but we learnt that that had closed some time ago, so we visited the Duisdale Hotel bar, made use of their loos and telephone, and sat by a nice warming wood fire with our drinks and crisps. It was quite busy, with some very delectable looking and smelling platefuls of food being brought to the nearby tables. It seemed harder negotiating the jetty steps on our way out after some good beer and cider, but we were soon warm and cosy on "Bumble Chugger", and enjoying some equally delectable eggs and bacon and mushrooms!



Monday 26 May. After our 5.30 am musical entertainment and forecast, we next roused as usual about 7.30. The boat seemed to be rocking about quite a lot, and when Rob stuck his head out of the cabin there came a startled "Where are we? I don't know where we are!". The mooring buoy had not been properly fixed to the ground, and the wind, having moved round to the south, had blown us and the buoy out of the bay and almost onto the further rocky shore. There was momentary panic as we tried to orientate ourselves. There was a hasty dressing and getting the engine started and we motored back, leaving the mooring where it had finished up, to anchor back near the Duisdale Hotel and recover from the shock over breakfast! We had set the log for our return and discovered that we'd drifted 1½ miles, missing several moored boats and a lot of rocks. We had been extremely lucky!

The wind was in the south which was good for our sail north up the Sound of Sleat, and we arrived at the narrow Kyle Rhea, between Skye and the mainland, just at low tide and had no problems getting through to Loch Alsh. At full springs the water runs in this narrow channel at 8 knots. Once into the loch we turned westwards to have a look at the Skye Bridge, and while up there we decided it would be better to do our shopping before setting off up Loch Duich. We cautiously approached a pontoon at Kyle of Lochalsh, with a strong wind blowing us onto it, and we then had a bit of a struggle manoeuvring "Bumble Chugger" round the end and onto the lee side of it. A very pleasant man came and helped us. He was a Dabber sailor, and he commented on what a fine sight we had been sailing in!



We wandered up to the cluster of shops and called into a cafe for a mid morning cup of tea. We had a doolallay waitress who was very busy cleaning a long row of windows. Rob went downstairs to the loo and came back saying it was locked. She said no, it wasn't locked. Rob went downstairs: came back again - he couldn't get in. She said "You've got to push really hard". Rob went down again: he came up again - he'd pushed really hard. Waitress couldn't believe it, but she went and got the key and went downstairs to open it! We had our cup of tea and filled in the Daily Telegraph Saturday prize crossword. I got it posted and stocked up on stores, while Rob tried to get money from holes in the wall at two banks. One wouldn't accept his card; the other was out of order, so he came back saying very uncomplimentary things about banks!

We set off again on a broad reach, with the wind still blowing hard, to get up to Loch Duich and Shiel Bridge where we were picking up Lucy. It was her half term, and as Ben and the other climbers were heading back to work after the Bank holiday break, she had arranged to join us for a few days on the boat. We sped up Loch Alsh with the bow wave spraying out impressively, rather intrigued by a monster cruiser "Lord of the Highlands" that looked very spooky with darkened glass windows, that kept wandering by and stopping, and turning and heading off in a different direction, and stopping and going in another direction. The wind was very gusty and just as we passed the cruiser on one of its halts, there was a loud cracking noise and the boom broke. It split diagonally at the mast end where the metal plate for the gooseneck is screwed on. We hastily got the main down, and then zoomed on up Loch Duich still doing 5 knots with only the jib up. I made a parcel of the break with a black plastic sack to keep the wood dry. Rob decided it may have been caused by a combination of too much sail and having the kicking strap too tight in such a strong wind.

We arrived and anchored in Invershiel Bay with plenty of time to spare. We were due to meet up between 4 and 5. We rowed ashore, and I set off along the road to Shiel Bridge, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away, to see if they had any epoxy glue - no luck, they only had super glue. Rob went in the opposite direction to the Kintail Lodge Hotel to get the water can filled. He came back with the news that we could have a shower there if we went along soon, before an expected crowd of hikers. This sounded a very attractive idea, and as we had just had a message from Lucy that they were having a quick meal at Clunnie Inn and would be with us by 5.30, we set off for the hotel. The manager gave us the key to the 'Bunkhouse', which was a really nice little self-contained hut, containing six bunk beds, a kitchen corner with sink and stove and microwave all fully equipped, a table and chairs, and an adjoining bathroom with loo and basin and shower. We had a wonderful shower and we changed into nice clean clothes! And we were only charged £1 each.

Back in the main building, we sat down in their sunroom with a pot of tea as there was no sign of Lucy. It had got to 5.40pm when we saw Lucy and Ben at the hotel gate, very relieved to see us. They had arrived earlier, when we must have been in the shower, and had then trundled up and down the road, stopping at various bars and shops, with Lucy saying "Have you seen my Mum and Dad?" "I've lost my Mum and Dad"! When they got to the Kintail Lodge Hotel they saw "Bum Chug" pulled up on the beach and went to the bar looking for "Mum and Dad". They were just giving up, when they checked the other side of the hotel, and saw us in the sunroom. Great greetings, and we gathered from Lucy that she had had a rough time climbing. We didn't stop to hear details then as Ben had to get back to the Clunnie Inn to pick up the others. They then had a long drive back to Sheffield. We said our farewells and Ben got off.

The rain was just starting: a nasty fine drizzle. Rob rowed me back to "Bumble Chugger", quite a long way, while Lucy walked round the beach for a shorter pick-up row. I got the gin and tonics

ready for their arrival, and we all tucked ourselves into the cabin and battened down the hatches against the rain which had become quite heavy. It soon warmed up and we heard some of Lucy's troubles. The main problem was her back, which had been aggravated by a fall down stairs at home. It had been made worse by sitting for the long car journey, and then carrying her heavy haversack, so when the others decided to spend the weekend Munro bagging she had not been able to join in. Ben had returned to the camp site with her on the first day and he did his knee in the next, so she had company, but the frustration was there, not being able to do what she had loved doing.

I think she felt better having got it off her chest, and after an hour the rain had almost stopped and we chugged back down the loch with a beautiful rainbow behind us. We found a sheltered anchorage in Totaig Bay opposite Eilan Donnan Castle. The tent went up and we had a fine supper to celebrate Lucy's arrival, followed by a good Moray malt. The wind and current was causing the boat to swing round and round in circles, so it was not a good idea to look out of the portholes!

Eilan Donnan Castle



Tuesday, 27 May. Lucy survived her 5.30 am awakening and by the time we got up a couple of hours later, there was clear blue sky, though no wind. The anchor came up totally enveloped in huge sheets of thick and heavy seaweed. It was quite difficult to get it off. We set off back to the pontoon at Kyle of Lochalsh, where Rob hoped to get glue and mend the boom.

The local marine store there produced Araldite and a clamp: they seemed to stock everything one could possibly want for the house and garden or boat, and the Harbour Master near by produced a five-day weather forecast. Several friendly divers were carrying their heavy gear down to the harbour, and chatted to Lucy about the wreck they were going out to investigate. Then Rob went down to the boat to start mending, while Lucy and I got petrol and shopped. It seemed a very compact little town, with everything one could need, even a clever looking mobile cinema. Back at the pontoon, a Wayfarer had arrived having sailed round from Plockton. Everyone is so friendly and ready to chat, and Rob had got on well with his mend. We were lucky with the dry, sunny weather which allowed the glue to set quickly.



Repairing boom - Kyleakin behind

So with the clamp still in place, we motored out and under the Skye Bridge, turning north across the mouth of Loch Carron, and along the Applecross Peninsular on the Inner Sound with Raasay and Rona on our left. It was amazingly calm with an oily sea, such a change from the day before. The

mountains towered beside us and we chugged along with Lucy at the helm, watching the fishing boats coming and going, and getting very excited when two porpoises passed by arching out of the water. In fact they were the first of many that we saw, together with seals and a host of birds - fulmars and guillemots, cormorants, divers, gulls, gannets, razorbills. Our route passed through a restricted area, peppered with buoys. We should have called someone up and got permission, but we didn't realise until afterwards, and no-one accosted us. There were areas of thousands of massed jelly fish, which put Lucy off the swim she was longing to have, even though the water was extremely cold.

Skye from Loch Alsh



Finally we reached Loch Torridon, looking very lovely, and started another long stretch of chugging to get to Loch Beag where we planned to anchor for the night, sheltered from the forecast south wind. In fact the wind did get up before we arrived, so we were able to cover the last mile or so under sail. The boom seemed fine: it had been very fortuitous that we'd had no wind all day and had not wanted to use the sails. Loch Beag ended in a lovely little bay; a few white-washed houses scattered around and sheep grazing up the steep hills. A few fishing boats were moored there, centred on a large shed. There were some spare buoys but we didn't trust them, and anchored close to the end shore.

It was stretching legs time, so two "Bum Chug" trips took us ashore. A very boggy hillside sloped up to the road and on to the small 'mountain' on the other side, that we had decided to conquer! It was conquered in fine style, and from the top we had a fine view over Upper Loch Torridon to Torridon in the distance. We heard a lot of bleating going on and found a mother sheep standing over her quite big lamb, that was lying on its back in a dip in the ground. Lucy went over to try and help it, but whether it was

Conquered summit - Loch Beag behind



weak from having been there a long time or whether it had hurt its legs, it scrambled away on its knees and fell over again, and Lucy only just managed to stop it falling over a steep rock face. We decided we'd better get it down to the houses at the bottom of our 'mountain', and Lucy manfully gathered it into her arms. As I said before, it was quite a large lamb, and she was staggering by the time she got to the bottom. I went off with the intention of shooing mother sheep in the same direction, but she was a wily old thing and led me a merry dance. I thought I was winning, then she suddenly doubled back on herself and I gave up. Down at the bottom, Rob knocked on the door of a

nearby cottage and an elderly lady came out. She contacted the local shepherd, who said he'd come over, and she chatted for a while, giving us a brief picture of how the area had changed since she'd arrived 40 years ago: the new houses that had been built and the people who lived there. The local fishermen no longer trawled but did creel fishing. There was a yacht moored near us which had 6 or 7 ropes hung over its side: we had wondered what they were for, but later saw them being pulled up with baskets attached. We left the lamb by her gate, with hopes that something could be done for it, and returned across the boggy hillside to the shore, Rob getting smelly mud up to his knee in the process!

Lucy was still feeling desperate for a wash, so after she'd rowed Rob back to "Bumble Chugger", she returned, stripped off and plunged into the water with a great shriek! The water was icy cold; I don't know how she did it, and it was pretty cold on dry land with a fine drizzle starting. We were soon all aboard and warmly tucked up in the cabin, eating our crumbed haddock suitably backed up with more Moray malt to follow.

Loch Beag



Wednesday morning (28 May) there was a bit of wind and a bit of rain, and we sailed to the end of Upper Loch Torridon. The clouds were hiding the tops of the mountains, but it was still looking magnificent. On the way, Lucy pointed out Lewisian Gneiss rock formations and Torridon sandstone cliffs. She recognised landmarks from previous visits by land. We sailed back down the loch with the intention of getting to Portree for the night: there were buses from there to Fort William and Glasgow, and Lucy wanted to get back to Sheffield on Thursday to start preparing for school on Monday, and to see Ben before he went off for the weekend. But the wind rose and rose, and reefs had to be put in, and by the time we got to the mouth of Loch Torridon it was gusting Force 7. There were ominous clouds over the Inner Sound and it was looking very unpleasant. It was a long way still to Portree, and Lucy and I were both very relieved when Rob decided we should turn back and return to Loch Beag. It was still a long way to go with the wind very fierce, so it was great to get back to the shelter of our little bay mid afternoon, and settle for a game of Scrabble and an early night.

Thursday, 29 May. The forecast on Thursday morning was reasonable, so we set off. It was still very windy in the Inner Sound, and it was a hard slog double reefed into the wind. We went south to Kyle Rona, and slipped through the calmer waters between the islands of Raasay and Rona, and onto another long stretch in the Sound of Raasay over to Portree. It remained very windy but the waves were more subdued than in the

Tied up at Portree



Inner Sound. We saw a group of about 10 canoeists paddling along the coast of Raasay, their brightly coloured paddles flashing in the sun. We motored the last part of the way as it was late afternoon by now. We'd covered 36 miles by time we arrive in Portree.

It was very pleasant entering Portree Harbour on the Isle of Skye. There were many fishing boats moored, and colourful houses lined the quay. We tied up to the slipway, and headed for the local bar at the Pier Hotel, where Lucy hoped to get information about buses. We were greeted like long lost friends, especially by a group of five or six RNLI men in their kilts, who were doing a sponsored lifeboat push and pull across Skye to raise money for children with leukemia. There was no rush for Lucy because the last bus of the day had gone, so we sat and enjoyed a drink. The boat pullers tried hard to persuade Lucy to forget about Sheffield and join their party. She was very tempted!

We shopped and checked the times of buses in the town square, while Rob sorted out the boat, and then got fish and chips which we ate on the slipway by the boat. A fleet of Toppers and a Laser moved out across the harbour, though there was not much wind for them by then. Lucy was totally sold on Portree and was busy making plans of how she could earn a living there - they needed a chippy in the fish and chip shop and a waitress in the nearby restaurant! The Lifeboat men came out to cheer us, as we left the slipway and chugged out to a mooring amongst the fishing boats for the night. They were well sozzled by then!



When we crossed to the slipway in the morning, there were other boats there that were bringing people ashore from a cruise ship moored out in the loch, and the Harbour Master directed us to a small pontoon round the corner. We went up to the square with Lucy and saw her onto the bus. She was not sure if she'd get the train from Fort William or from Glasgow, but either way it was going to take her all day, and she was not going to get to Sheffield until well into the evening. There were a surprising number of other people waiting to get on the bus, mostly with big rucksacks. It was a sad moment waving goodbye. We busied ourselves with water and petrol and weather forecasts, and set off on our hoped for trip to the Outer Hebrides, with the Harbour Master informing Stornoway of our expected arrival on Saturday.

The weather seemed to be fairly settled for a few days, and it was a gorgeous morning as we motored out of Portree into the Sound of Raasay past cliffs that swept down to the sea and appeared to be covered in smooth, bright green velvet. There was no wind at all at first, so unfortunately we couldn't sail, and later in the day when there was some, it was in the wrong direction, almost the opposite to the south easterly forecast.

The water was like a millpond and the sun was shining as we crossed The Minch. Everywhere was teeming with sea birds: we saw so many more than we had on our trip to Sweden. Cormorants and razorbills and guillemots kept popping up beside us, and frantically scuttled away when they saw the monster beside them! And dozens of puffins. They are sweet little birds, much smaller than I'd

imagined, with a sudden little flurry and splash as they dived. When they flew to get away from us, their little wings whirred, and their red feet paddled as they bounced along the tops of the waves on their tummies! We passed through a huge congregation of about 60 guillemots and 10 or more gannets, and we had many sightings of porpoises. I'm sure I saw one dolphin but we are very unsure of the differences between the two, and it became an ongoing argument! Some large birds, maybe fulmars, seemed to play games with us, swooping down towards the mast or the forestay and swerving at the last minute.



The wind was cold when it did arrive, and even with the sails up we had to motor. We made very good time, and decided to change plans. We had originally thought we would spend Friday night sheltered in a bay in the Shiant Islands, 10 miles off the shore of Lewis. These were very impressive islands as we sailed near by, with huge grass topped cliffs towering out of the sea and many seabirds wheeling around them, but we headed on to the mainland, a rocky, inhospitable looking coast, and tucked ourselves into a little cove, Tob Limeray, off Loch Shell.

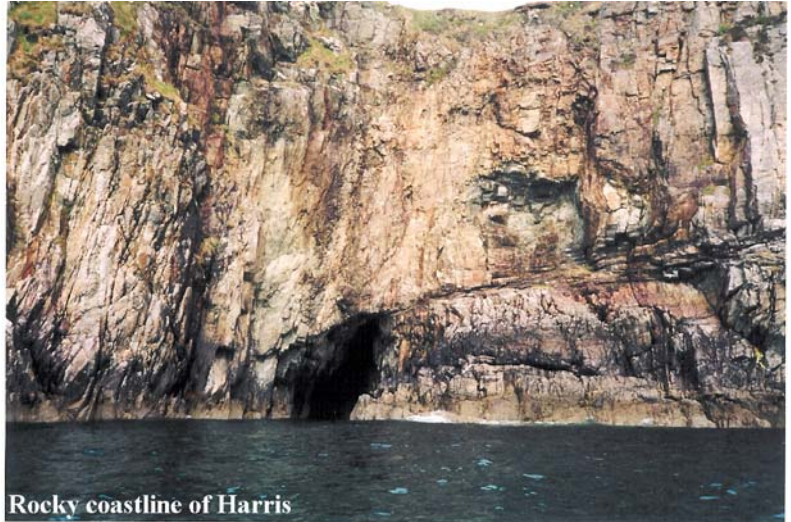
It was quiet and sunny as we gently motored in, and once we'd anchored the peace was complete. A bay of lowish rocky mounds surrounded us, grass and sheep covered, dotted with austere grey little houses. Some fishing boats were anchored near a big shed, which was common by fishing villages, I suppose for dealing with the fish when they were brought in. It all basked in the sun, and I tried to catch a feel of the scene with a pencil sketch, but not very successfully. Once the sun had gone down, it became a



bleak landscape, and the peace was slightly spoilt by some motor noise from the fish farm. Cuckoos were very vociferous here too, as they had been on Skye. A Crepette challenge was won by Rob.

Saturday, 31 May. At last the wind had moved round to the south-east, which they had forecast for the day before and which would have been helpful then, but which was in the wrong direction for our

trip southwards to Tarbert. We had decided not to venture further north to Stornoway as the guide book did not make it sound a particularly attractive town, and mentioned problems of drugs and vandalism. We had a short potter sailing in Loch Shell, and then set off down the Sound of Shiant, motor-sailing along past tumbled, rocky cliffs, with glimpses of caves. A hazy sun had appeared and it was a little warmer. Some seals basked on an island rock, and we noticed a deserted house was tucked into one of the inhospitable valleys plunging down to the sea.



The wind kept heading us and the sails had to come down as we motored into Loch Tarbert under a high, suspension bridge crossing from the island of Scalpay. We were able to sail the last couple of miles, the shores dotted with occasional little grey houses, and into Tarbert harbour. We picked up a buoy and rowed to a long flight of steps, which took us up to the main road of the town: a fairly featureless row of houses interspersed with a couple of gift shops and a general store. We wanted to find the Harbour Master to get the latest forecast, and to ask him to contact Stornoway to let them know that we'd changed our plans and would not be going there. The people we spoke to were not particularly welcoming. They all chatted to each other in Gaelic, and we were definitely made to feel like intruders.

We trekked down to the ferry terminal, but it seemed deserted and the information centre was closed for their lunch hour. So back we trekked to the other side of the town to fill up the petrol cans, stopping at the Harris Hotel on the way back to enquire about baths. They had bathrooms available at £6 each, which we thought was rather expensive, so we booked just one for later in the afternoon, and the receptionist kindly said she'd let us have two towels and two pieces of soap! We shopped on



the way back to the boat, again feeling unwelcome, and disappointed not to find a Saturday Daily Telegraph, though I suppose that was to be expected. Having got everything back on board, we collected our wash things and clean clothes and returned to the Harris Hotel. It was on the west side of the town, and we walked a little further along the road, to where we could see the Atlantic. It was an epic moment to look out over the breaking rollers - a very long way to America!

Our bath was absolutely gorgeous: lovely hot water and fluffy white towels, and our own loo. We wallowed in luxury for a while, and washed our dirty clothes in a tiny basin, and then returned to our

spartan existence on “Bumble Chugger”, cheered with a cup of tea and some bread and blackcurrant jam.

We left Tarbert soon after five, following the south coast of Loch Tarbert, and island dodging to get to Plocrapol Bay, 4 miles away on South Harris. It had become quite misty and murky, and our chart GPS (Garmin 176) was quite wonderful showing exactly where we were, and where the shallow bits and rocks were. Such a journey would have been quite risky without it, and with visibility so poor we could easily have got lost. We anchored in a small sheltered bay with a few houses around the edge. There were sheep and lambs on the hills rising from the water, and they kept us well entertained with their antics. Twelve or so of the lambs all got together and played hectic games up and down the slopes, leaping several feet into the air, and seeming to play ‘follow-my-leader’ and ‘I’m king of the castle’! After half an hour or so of frantic activity, they returned to their mums and quietly grazed. So it was a rather distracted game of Scrabble that was played, with Rob winning this time.

Rob was very concerned about getting back to Skye, as the weather map presented a very unsettled picture. The 5.30 am shipping forecast on Sunday was not particularly bad, wind 4-5 gusting 6, but he decided we should get up straight away and get off. It was misty and still as we made our way out through the islands, but the wind gradually got up as we crossed The Little Minch. It seemed a very long haul, and the distant cliffs of Skye took forever to get any closer. The wind picked up until it was a Force 6, and we had to double reef the mainsail as we battled our way towards Dunvegan Loch. Here the wind was funnelling out through the mountains becoming a good Force 7 with fierce little squalls whipping through. The loch seemed endless as we crawled against the wind and the waves and the rain towards Dunvegan at the head of the loch: we tried using the motor, keeping close to the shore, but made so little headway that we raised the sails again and managed to make progress in a rather hairy fashion! (We can highly recommend the sticking ability of Araldite!)

After 9 hours non-stop sailing we finally passed Dunvegan Castle and the pier and picked up a mooring outside the Dunvegan Hotel. It was such a relief to stop, and I hadn’t been doing anything - I don’t know how Rob had kept going for so long. We had covered 36 miles. I’d been looking forward to a peaceful, sheltered harbour, but it was far from that: the wind howled and whistled across the lowish hills separating us from Loch Bracadale, and we bounced and juddered around, but it was great to tuck ourselves into the cabin, and warm up, and listen to the rain pattering on the roof. There was a shipping forecast just before 6 that we wanted to listen to, but we got so engrossed in a really nasty game of Scrabble that we missed it. (A fairly close score, but Rob again winning.) The wind quietened down in the night and we had thought of making an early start in the morning, but it was rising again when we listened to the 5.30 am forecast, which was not too good, so we went back to sleep again.

Monday, 2nd June. We wanted to get ashore, particularly as we’d run out of water. The buoy we were moored to was in a very windy spot with the gusts funnelling down the valley, but we had no choice. Rowing “Bum Chug” ashore could have been a bit dodgy, so we took “Bumble Chugger” over to the pontoon outside the hotel. It was not easy getting onto it, and I was nearly



lost over the side (which would have been very cold!), but we got tied up and went into the hotel enquiring about petrol and water and loos. We accomplished all our jobs and went into the hotel for a pot of tea, as we realised we'd made use of their private pontoon. The newspaper I'd got was four days old, so not much use with its weather forecast, so I did a quick trip back to the shop and was surprised to get a refund.

We chugged back to the buoy and hung all the washing out to dry: there was a brisk breeze with the sun shining. It was a lovely day, and though the wind gusting Force 7 was a bit disturbing, it was comforting to know we were tied onto a safe, strong buoy. Rob did some repair jobs, wrote up the log and checked the charts and pilots, and I did a crayon sketch of the view down the loch, which I felt better pleased with than other recent efforts. I also spent some time working out how to send a text message to Lucy. She'd sent a couple to us, and I really thought I should be able to respond. I found it pretty easy really - got myself up one rung on the mind blowing technology ladder! Then down to mundane Scrabble, with a horrid game that went on for over two hours with no quarter given. Close again, but a lucky hand picked up by me on my last go clinched it in my favour. A big yacht "Tellulah" came in and wandered around us and then anchored in a rather odd place, well out in the loch - I would have thought it was catching more gusts than us.

Tuesday, 3rd June. The most exciting memory of today was when we were well out in a grey, choppy sea, slogging along round the coast past Neist Point, when 4 or 5 dolphins appeared and played around the boat. It was a quite wonderful sight, and cheered the voyage no end. They arched and rolled out of the water for 2 or 3 minutes and then they disappeared as suddenly as they'd come.



After a calm night, we had left early at 7, with the wind beginning to rise. Rob had checked with Stornoway coast guards that we should be all right for our trip round into Loch Bracadale, though a gale was expected to arrive early evening. The sail out of Loch Dunvegan went smoothly with the wind behind us, but by the mouth and southwards along Dunvegan Head, the wind was funnelling out through the cliffs of Loch Tiel in gusts of Force 7, and the sailing was very uncomfortable even with both reefs in and the jib half furled. Beyond Neist Point, we headed out to sea on a long tack and the wind moderated a lot, though the waves were big. It was a long, long slog out to sea and then it seemed to take forever inching back towards the land. There were odd shaped pinnacles of rock along the wide entrance to Loch Bracadale, and once we had crept past them we were in more comfortable waters though still quite exposed. Large flocks of gannets were gliding around either side of us, and making spectacular rocket-like dives into the sea.

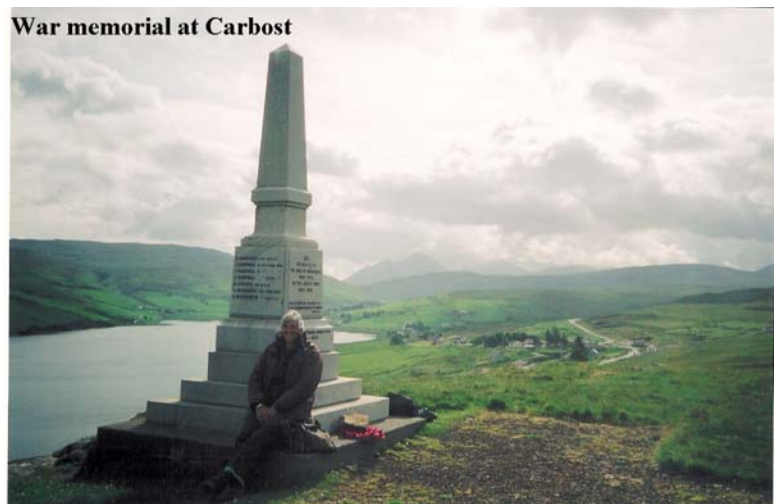
It was still some way to go to get to the more sheltered Loch Harport, and when we reached Portnalong we had done 44 miles. We had looked at a bay a short way before Portnalong - we thought it might be more sheltered from the forecast gale, but no-one else was anchored there and we decided it might be wiser to go on. The wind was getting up and the rain had started as we anchored, tucked into the far side of Portnalong Bay beyond a big fish farm and several fishing boats. There

was a lot of activity on a slipway, with little boats from the fish farm arriving and tractors trundling up to lorries by a big shed, but it was near going home time, and soon all was quiet and deserted.

It was nice to get cosy in the cabin with the wind beginning to howl outside. The Messiah went on our CD player, we played Crepette and had supper. We were ready for an early bed and were tucked in before 9. Rob was uneasy with the rising wind, and peered out of his porthole now and again. At 10.30 there was a little bump and Rob shot out of the cabin. The anchor had not held on a rocky ledge and was now hanging vertically from the boat. We'd drifted out into the bay and by some miraculous chance we'd been blown round a tubby little fishing boat "Maggie", and "Bum Chug" had caught on her mooring rope and held us. We were so lucky - the next collision could have been with a large hulking metal boat by the fish farm, inappropriately called "Annaterry Jane", or into the fish farm tanks where we would have caused havoc. We hastily donned a few clothes - it was cold, wild, wet and windy - managed to free "Bum Chug", and Rob got a line onto a stern cleat on "Maggie". We were now pretty secure, but we still spent a scary night as the gale blew itself out.

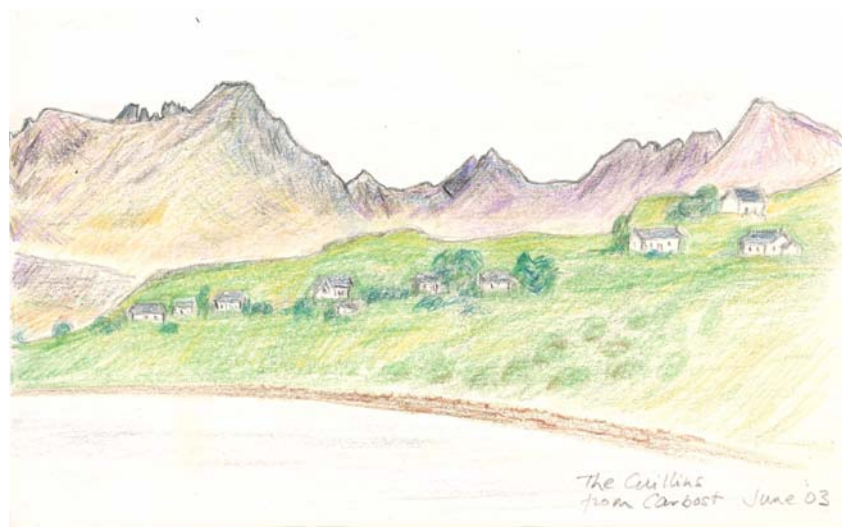
Wednesday was a beautiful morning and we were up early in case "Maggie" wanted to go fishing. We motored further up Loch Harport to Carbost, a couple of miles from the head of the loch with the Cuillins towering beyond. There were a couple of visitors' buoys outside the Old Inn, one was occupied by a large yacht from Southampton which left soon after our arrival, and we tied onto the other one and rowed ashore.

Carbost's main claim to fame is the Talisker Distillery. We wanted to go round it, but it was still very early, so we walked through the village and up a small hill with a war memorial on top. There were dozens of bright little flowers in the grass, purple and blue and yellow and red, and the view from the top was quite breath taking.



Next stop was the distillery. It was only 9.30 but already the car park was filling up. We got into the 10 o'clock group, and were given a dram to sip as we looked round the interesting visitors' centre filled with displays on the history of the distillery and the local area. It was an interesting tour, very similar to the one we'd had at Tobermory. Of course no-one was giving away any secrets. Here the water from the burn that the barley was steeped in was supposed to be significant, and we were invited to sniff a handful of the soaked barley. Rob couldn't smell anything, and my handful smelt of Marmite, probably from making sandwiches for lunch!

We shopped in the village shop; tiny but containing a remarkable variety of goods packed in, and then settled at the Old Inn on their patio overlooking the water in the sun. We sipped our drinks and



had a delicious bowl of scotch broth - quite idyllic! Back on board, Rob relaxed and I did a sketch of the Cuillins, which were free of cloud and looking very impressive. Another Scrabble tussle which Rob won.

Thursday, 5th June. The wind was well up, so we planned a day into Portree, mainly to get a 5-day weather forecast. We weren't sure about bus times, but one had passed us about 9.30 on our walk yesterday morning, so we were at the bus stop by 9. I went up to the shop to enquire, but their timetable was over a year old and they didn't think it would be accurate, but it did mention a bus at 9.35. Sure enough a bus did arrive, but it was going to Glenbrittle. The bus driver said that he returned to Carbost an hour later and then went into Portree, and that if we wanted to hop onto the bus we were welcome to the ride. So we had an added bonus of a trip along the Cuillins and down to Glenbrittle, where we were most upset to see that the historic red telephone box, Glenbrittle 1, had gone. The only other people on the bus was a very pleasant young couple who were going walking in the Cuillins, and we chatted to them as we rattled along the bumpy, twisting road. He had cycled from Stornoway southwards and crossed to Uist, and he recommended the trip when I said Lucy planned to do it one day on her bicycle, Mary. He said there was an excellent bunkhouse run by some fishermen, which must have been near Plocrapol Bay where we'd anchored.

We rattled back to Carbost, paid our bus fare, and rattled into Portree.

It was a very satisfactory visit. We got the 5-day weather forecast from the Harbour Master and had a chat about the weather; we had tea and scones in a restaurant and discussed plans and did the crossword; we got a new bucket, which had become an urgent necessity; we got a new gas canister for the lamp; did some food shopping; and had a baked potato lunch at The Isles Inn on the main square where our return bus left from.

There was still a strong wind on the loch when we got back. Another yacht, "Serendipity", had arrived in our absence and had moored on the other buoy. Their tender was ashore and they were visiting the pub. A seal popped its head up and watched us as we rowed out to "Bumble Chugger". Soon after, the other crew returned to their boat. They had a certain amount of trouble as their outboard engine wouldn't start, and they had to row. The seal popped his head up again to watch.



The wind increased all evening and was soon a definite 7 with gusts of 8 coming through. It was uncomfortable for our Scrabble game (Rob won again) and cooking supper, as we swung and rolled and bumped about a lot. Sometime during the evening, the yacht "Tallulah" came in and did her circling act again, and then anchored quite close to the shore. It must have been uncomfortable for her, and at some stage she left, as there was no sign of her in the morning. It was a horrid, uncomfortable night and we didn't get much sleep. Rob got up twice, once to increase the length of

our mooring rope, and then to set the boom off centre in the hope that that would stop our bobstay banging and rubbing on the mooring rope.

By morning the wind was down a bit, but it was very wet. We stayed on board all morning, and after an early lunch we rowed ashore. At the pub the “Serendipity”s were having lunch and we said our ‘hellos’. They were setting off on a walk to Loch Talisker with their golden retriever dog. We had also planned the same walk. They set off first, but we got ahead of them after a short cut across a hill. They were walking much faster than us and soon overtook us and after we’d stopped to look at a waterfall on the Talisker burn, they were out of sight. We got well into the Talisker valley but not as far as the loch, but we’d already gone further than we’d meant to - “just going to the top of the next rise, we should be able to see the sea” - and Rob’s ankle was hurting a lot by the time we’d got back to the Old Inn. There we had some gorgeous hot showers and retired to the bar for a drink.

Rob had been concerned that the oil in the engine was a little low. We’d tried at the shop earlier for some with no luck, but Fiona from the Inn had come in and said her partner might have some but he was away for the day. We returned to the Inn with her where she tried phoning him but with no success, but Angus behind the bar said he’d just bought some yesterday so he could let us have some. So in the bar, we collected our oil and downed



Guinnesses and cider (I was amazed to find Rob enjoying Guinness - not his tippie at home), and chatted to the locals gathered there, who had been there when we left for our walk and were now well away in their beers and snifters of malt.

It was a lovely evening on board, not at all the Force 6 and 7s they’d forecast. I lost at Crepette and am fed up with Rob winning everything!

Saturday 7th June. The forecast was not good. While we were having breakfast, “Serendipity” packed up and kitted themselves out and set off. They were doing a clockwise circumnavigation of Skye and were heading for Dunvegan. We had planned a late morning start because of the tides, so we went ashore for stores and water. As we were rowing back we could see a yacht in the distance coming up the loch. We wondered if it was “Serendipity”, and sure enough it was, coming back to her buoy. Rob rowed over to her and stayed for a cup of tea and a chat. Apparently they’d got as far as the open water beyond Portnalong, and the wind and seas were so nasty that they’d turned back. It was difficult to believe as at Carbost it became quite sunny with a reasonable wind, though gusty, and Rob was getting very itchy feet to get off. Fortunately each time he suggested moving off, a big gust came through and made him change his mind!

He’d asked the four on board “Serendipity” back to “Bumble Chugger” for drinks at 6. At 5 we started wondering how we could accommodate them all comfortably. Fortunately it was a pleasant evening, so we planned to empty the cockpit things into the cabin, so we could all sit outside. Soon after 5 we had a call from them on the VHF radio. Quite exciting being called up on Channel 16 and moving over to a channel of ones choice to chat! “Serendipity” were worried about leaving the dog

on board, she wouldn't have settled being upwind of us, and they suggested we went over to them for a drink, which was much more sensible on their big boat, and we breathed a sigh of relief that we didn't have to rearrange all our stuff.

They were very welcoming, and after drinks they suggested we stayed on for a meal, which we accepted. Very good gammon with pineapple and veg, followed by raspberry pavlova. The little village shop had done well! Kally and John Leiper were part owners of the boat, a Sadler 32, and had sailed a lot on the east coast of Skye, but this was their first venture round to the west. They had sailed across to Ireland which was where Kally came from and they knew the River Deben quite well. They lived at Plockton, just north of Kylelochals, and they had two daughters in their mid twenties; one was profoundly deaf and working in Edinburgh, and the other had stopped 3 years into a 4 year engineering degree and had gone out to Australia with her boyfriend. Their dog Amber, a golden retriever, was a big dog to have on board, but she seemed well adjusted to life afloat. The other couple, Chris and Iain MacGregor, had recently retired to Oban after 25 years working in Abu Dhabi. He'd been employed by the Saudi Arabian government as a mechanical engineer on desalination plants, and had met the Leipers there when John was an oil engineer with BP for three years. They also had two daughters.

The conversation was mostly about life in Abu Dhabi, and we heard hair raising stories of boating racing and mayhem in Kestrels, which they were very involved with organising. The constant presence of incompetent, heavily armed police and harbour officials had added spice to life!

We said our farewells about ten, and as soon as we were back on board we set sail and headed off to Portnalong ready for an early start in the morning. It was a beautiful evening with the sun still on the clouds. Unfortunately there was not enough wind for the sails and we had to motor most of the way. Once there, we tied onto the back of sturdy "Maggie" - we weren't going to trust the anchor again!

Sunday morning the alarm got us up at 4, and we were away before 5. It was a cloudy morning with a small breeze, and as we motored out into Loch Bracadale we could see "Serendipity" coming up from Carbost. At the entrance to the loch where our ways parted, we called them up on the radio and wished them a safe journey. We put the sails up, but we had to motor-sail all the next 9 hours to Mallaig. We were surrounded by heavy clouds and great curtains of rain gliding through, though we were very lucky and not much rain dumped itself on us, but it was cold, icy cold, almost as cold as we'd been all holiday.

We had planned to call in at Soay and anchor in the bay there for lunch, but it looked too grey and dismal to bother, so we decided to keep on the long tack we were taking all along the shore of Rhum, and head straight for Mallaig. The skies were clearing to the west of us and a rainbow shone, though straight ahead, over the mainland, solid grey black rain clouds were blotting everything out. Somehow we seemed to push the clouds before us, and patches of blue appeared and then an ark of blue and then the sun came out and bathed us in warmth. It was still only about 11, but it had already been a long day, so we didn't divert to Soay but pressed on towards the black cloud. This too evaporated before us and moved northwards, though clouds now covered the blue and the sun. A couple of miles out from Mallaig, and only 20 minutes to go, the rain finally got to us. It was not too heavy but it was annoying getting our dry sailing clothes wet. At 1.30 pm we motored into Mallaig harbour with a great sense of relief and tied up to a buoy near the shore. We'd done it - we'd been to the Outer Hebrides and we'd been round Skye!

The rain eased as we emptied the cabin and had a well deserved cup of tea. After a little relaxation we rowed ashore, and were surprised to find everything open and buzzing. We thought Sunday would still be a rest day up here. We wandered through the town, did a small shop and tried to get yesterday's Daily Telegraph, without success. Back on board we snoozed and took things easy - it had been a long day!

Monday, 9th June. We woke to a beautiful morning, and for the first time the air almost felt balmy. Out came the shorts and sandals. We went ashore to get petrol and water and to get a 5-day forecast from the Harbour Master and let him know that we were back. Strong wind was due to come in later in the day, but during the next few days was due to get progressively less.

We set off in high spirits south along the coast heading for Arisaig, with a reasonable wind in the right direction for a change. We'd planned to have lunch at Arisaig, but the journey took longer than we'd expected and we had our sandwiches on the way. The water leading up to Arisaig Harbour was a maze of rocks. Fairly recently the channel had been marked with perches. I would not have liked to have gone in before they were in place and pre-GPS. The wind was quite strong around the entrance and we followed a long winding course in through the rocks to a sheltered bay where 20 or so large, smart yachts were moored. One was flying the blue ensign with a crown on it and we wondered who was on board. We picked up an empty buoy to have a short pause, but almost immediately a boat arrived saying it was his mooring and he was in a hurry. Having been disturbed we decided to set off back to Mallaig.

Out in the Sound of Arisaig on the open water, the wind was increasing and the sky looked threatening with heavy, murky clouds coming up from the south. We could see Mallaig in the far distance and doing 6 knots on the run it only took us 2 ½ hours to get back, but I was sure the storm was going to catch up with us and I got very twitchy! As we turned into Mallaig Harbour, the wind was up to Force 7, and once again it was a great relief to tie onto our friendly buoy. A fine two masted square rigged boat was tied up at the pier.

We settled down to food and Scrabble, which I again lost. We were well sheltered and not too disturbed by the gale whistling overhead and the driving rain. It looked unpleasant for the fish workers who were busy on the docks until 9 o'clock or so.

Tuesday should have dawned a better day, but according to the 5.30 forecast another low seemed to be coming in, dashing our hopes of sailing out to Eigg for lunch and then down to Loch Moidart where we could spend the night. It was windy and wet. We decided to have a day out in "Tugger" (our Rav 4), so we set off, and 3 miles out of Mallaig turned up a small road along the north shore of Loch Morar. Loch Morar is Britain's deepest lake of fresh water. It is thought to contain its own monster, known as Morag. It is a beautiful lake with old forests of oak and alder and rowan growing down to the water's edge. There were splashes of colour from wild rhododendrons, broom, yellow flags and foxgloves. There were a few houses dotted along the shore and a converted church and rectory that looked like a retreat, but



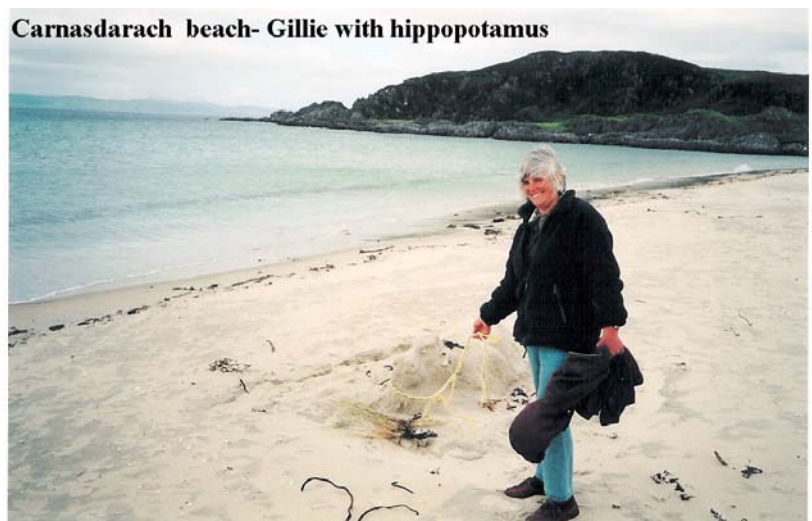
mostly it seemed to be inhabited by sheep up on the hills to our left and on fine green sward down to the water. A bonus was the sun coming out, though the wind was still whipping up the water.

The road only took us a quarter of the way along the loch. We parked at the end and walked on along a track which was going on to Tarbet, 12 miles away. Rocky promontories jutted out into the lake and we did some scrambling before setting off back to the car. We passed a couple hiking with their dog, and they asked us to take a photo of them. They were Dutch and were doing a long round - up to Tarbet and across onto Loch Nevis, round the end and back to Inverie on the north shore, where they could get a ferry back to Mallaig. I'm afraid they would have had rather wet, miserable weather for their next couple of days walking.

On the way back to the main road we passed a little hydro electric station with a series of rocky falls leading out into a sandy estuary. On the main road we were directed onto the "trunk road" which had opened during our 3 weeks up here. It was fine dual carriage road that took us the 7 miles to Arisaig very quickly. The hotel on the water front had a bar annex where we went for a drink. It was a pretty dismal, uninspiring place, with a TV blaring, but the drinks were OK. We drove down to the end of the jetty for our lunch, and it was interesting seeing the rocky entrance and the mooring area, where we had visited by sea the day before, from a different view point. The sun was still shining and the wind started abating, and we hoped this was the start of the promised improving weather.



Heading back to Mallaig, we kept off the trunk road and wound along the old coast road that took us past silver sanded bays filled with outcrops of rocks and turquoise coloured water. A footpath from a car park led us through dunes to a large crescent of sand, Carnasdarach beach, where Rob had seen people paddling as we'd passed by in "Bumble Chugger". It was deserted today apart from a fine hippopotamus sand castle. On a rocky bluff on the far side we paused and enjoyed the view, and watched some busy meadow pipits.



We had been lucky with our day: by the time we were back on board, it was raining and the wind was really strong again. I lost again!

Wednesday 11th June. It was raining hard in the morning, and having heard the latest shipping forecast decided there was no point hanging around for another couple of days. Rob rang Lucy to catch her before she left for school, to find out if we could call in to stay for the night. It was not convenient for them, so we arranged to be there Thursday night, which in fact turned out to be much more convenient for us in the end.

We went looking for Hugh Cameron, and found him buzzing around in a little fork lift truck, and arranged for him to lift “Bumble Chugger” out in about 40 minutes. We were both apprehensive about how the operation would go, but we both ended up being amazed. Hugh Cameron was so understanding and helpful and totally proficient at his job. He helped us get the straps round the hull and then returned to his cab in his huge mobile yellow crane, which he’d stabilised on 4 pneumatic legs. “Bumble Chugger” was 20 foot down in the dock and out of his sight, so with me relaying messages up from Rob who was still on board, he gently lifted “Bumble Chugger” up. She had to go up and down a few feet several times before he was satisfied that the slings were correctly positioned, then Rob climbed up on the quay. With Rob holding the bow rope and me holding the stern rope, up came “Bumble Chugger” to be swung over the trailer that Rob had parked on the far side of the crane. I thought it was going to be a tricky job getting the boat placed precisely in position on the trailer, but - no problem. She was pin pointed over the trailer, and with Rob and me controlling her swing, she was placed with extreme gentleness dead centre, leaving us with just a foot of winding up by hand.

We had been lucky: the rain had stopped all this time, and it stayed dry while we derigged and packed everything away. A dock worker, who had helped with getting “Bumble Chugger” launched, came over and chatted, and enquired about our trip; and a fisherman offered to help with the mast and stayed to chat about his health problems. He went fishing from Mallaig, but travelled up every few weeks from his home in Portsmouth, where he was about to return to have a malfunctioning heart valve attended to.

Rob popped up to the Harbour Master’s office to say goodbye and thank you, and we were off just as the rain returned. There was a Force 6 out at sea, and it looked grey and uninviting - we had definitely made the right decision.

It was the start of a very long drive for Rob. First on the trunk road then back onto narrow winding picturesque roads, at one point through a valley with its sides completely smothered in purple rhododendrons; along dramatic roads through the mountains with a stop by Loch Leven for lunch; past Glen Coe and Loch Lomond. The weather steadily improved as we headed south. The traffic was very slow through Glasgow, but it was finally behind us, and we’d crossed the lowlands back into England and turned off at Penrith onto the road to Ullswater.

We arrived at Pooley Bridge at 7, and were soon enjoying much needed drinks at “The Star” in the evening sunshine. It was the day of the England v. Slovakia match, and the pub was well set up with a big screen and rows of chairs. It was filling up as we left, and I expect it got very noisy later on, especially as England won. We went off along a little track leading down to the water. There were a lot of boats moored round the edge, but no sign of the 10 Shrimpers that are kept on Ullswater. There was a possible spot to spend the night, but we drove off along the east side of the lake to investigate further. It was a very narrow single track road, but it was not until we got to a sign saying it was not a through road, and there was no turning point at the end, that Rob hesitated. We were at a slight widening of the road and commenced our three-point turn - not easy with the boat length the same as the width of the road! We unhitched and got the car round but were finding

it difficult to move the boat. By this time we'd caused a minor traffic jam in each direction, so we soon had offers of assistance, and got "Bumble Chugger" turned and fixed back onto "Tugger". We stayed where we were, as there was room for cars to pass us, and settled down for supper and the night.

Thursday dawned a beautiful day and it was a very different view from our portholes from what we had become used to: gentle hills nearby covered in morning mist, with the sheep grazing and woodland birds singing in the overhanging trees. We had a leisurely start and headed south along the west shore of Ullswater. We nearly had a serious problem getting over Kirkstone Pass. Poor "Tugger" went slower and slower and we really thought she was not going to get "Bumble Chugger" to the top. We all sighed a big sigh of relief as we headed down towards Windermere, not to mention some rather frustrated drivers who had not been able to get past us.

It was an uneventful drive south, a bit delayed when we went wrong on the Manchester ring road and got ourselves lost in the wilds of Oldham. We stopped in a lay by on the Snake Pass for our lunch and a short pause, and were horrified watching the antics of some of the madmen driving by. It was great to finally arrive at Lucy's house in Forres Road. The key had been left out for us and we made ourselves at home with cups of tea. We then enjoyed a wallow in their recently installed new bath - Lucy was worried that the hot water would not behave, but we had no problems. It was so lovely to see Lucy when she got back from school and exchange all our latest news, and she cooked us a delicious supper. Unfortunately Ben had been away for the day and did not get back until late. We did see him briefly at breakfast and saw them both off to work. It had been a very pleasant interlude at the end of our holiday, and we headed south back to Surbiton.