

Four-up in a Shrimper at ISW

In June 2021, after a season chasing Cornish Shrimpers around Poole Harbour in my 14ft Post Boat, I decided that I had downsized too far, bought *Natalie* (867), a 2002 Mk 2 Shrimper 19, and joined the Shrimper Owners Association. The SOA website is full of the exploits of Shrimper owners, so when the venue for ISW 2022 was announced as the Firth of Clyde, I signed up for a sailing adventure, promising my wife that she could always go ‘island hopping’ if conditions became too rough. We also turned to long-time sailing friends Cathy and Pete Neyland to see if we could sail four-up in a Shrimper. *Natalie* had come with an ‘as new’ cockpit tent, so we began to dream of still nights on moonlit lochs and maybe the sound of a distant piper. Jon Davies, Class Captain of PYC Shrimpers, gave us plenty of good advice on the perils of towing, so with a fully serviced trailer we lifted out on 16th June and made ready for our 500-mile journey to Largs.

The pontoon berths at the impressive Largs Marina were officially booked for ten nights from Monday 20th although we retired to our two double bedroom AirBnB flat in Largs town centre, a bargain at £25 per couple per night, leaving only three nights ‘at sea’. Many Shrimpers had already assembled from around the UK and Holland, with others like *Bluejay*, *Camaron* and *Moonfleet* reaching the end of their sea passages having launched at Inverness a few weeks earlier and taken the Caledonian Canal to the west coast and the Crinan Canal into Loch Fyne.



Largs Marina looking across to Great Cumbrae



Moneyppenny breezing the Largs Channel

DAY 1, Monday 20th June: Now joined by Cathy and Pete, we hoisted the mast and rigged the boat in quick order as the sun was out and the sea was beckoning. Around 32 boats were attending the rally and there was a good mix of Shrimper 19s and 21s. It wasn't a designated sailing day but with azure blue skies and a light breeze, we took the opportunity to sail the Largs Channel between Great Cumbrae and the coastline and were rewarded with stunning views. Back on land the fleet gathered in the evening at Nardinis, an Art Deco restaurant on Largs seafront for a welcome supper.

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DAY 2, Tuesday 21st June: This was the official shakedown sail around the islands of Great and Little Cumbrae, 8 miles in total. With light winds and a south-running tide, we motor-sailed to the north tip of Great Cumbrae in order to reach gently down the western shoreline of this peaceful island measuring 4 miles in length and just over a mile wide. With lunchtime approaching, we sailed through the gap between the two islands to discover a large bay and the quaint seaside town of Millport. Unlike Poole, there were plenty of rocks to avoid, but we found a very pleasant anchorage off Millport beach with views over to Hunterston Nuclear Power Station. So far, four-up in a Shrimper 19 was working well with the on-board loo, privacy curtain and gimbaled gaz stove coming into their own.



Crew of Natalie



Millport Bay looking across to Hunterston Power Station

DAY 3, Wednesday 22nd June: Day three was the start of a passage to Tarbert via the Kyles of Bute, with the first leg an 8 mile sail to Port Bannatyne on the Isle of Bute. The wind was blowing from the NW and just about strong enough to sail on port tack most of the way. The weather was overcast all day, but we did see the *Waverley* paddle steamer making passage from Glasgow via Largs to Tarbert. Only three people can comfortably sit on the high side of a Shrimper, so my wife gladly volunteered to take the *Waverley* to Rothesay and was rewarded with a tour of the last remaining sea-going paddle steamer in the world, built in 1946.



Boudicca Chasing the Waverley



ISW fleet rafted up at Port Bannatyne

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At our morning briefing, Port Bannatyne was described as a cosy marina just along the coast from the main port of Rothesay. With around 23 boats making the passage, we rafted up stern-to, three abreast. After a few hours preparing the boat for two ladies inside and two men in the cockpit tent, with lots of tips on how best to rig a Shrimper tent (it goes under the gaff but over the boom!), we took the short bus ride into Rothesay for a group Scottish meal at the Victoria Hotel, with dishes such as Cullen Skink, Balmoral Chicken and Cranachan on the menu. Rothesay is a Victorian resort that has seen better days, but many of its features remain, including the quayside washrooms, bandstand and pier. From our window seat in the hotel it was possible to imagine scenes of yesteryear, and right on cue the *Waverley* came in on her return journey to Glasgow.



Natalie ready for the night



Victorian washrooms at Rothesay pier

DAY 4, Thursday 23rd June: Fortunately it was a still dry night under the cockpit tent and it was a good idea to be an early riser with the limited portacabin facilities ashore. After hot showers and breakfast on the boat, we made an 0830 start on for our sail up the East Kyle of Bute, down the West Kyle and back up Loch Fyne to Tarbert, a total of 21 nautical miles. The sea state was smooth so we were back to four in a boat. We had been briefed to look out for the Maids of Bute after rounding Buttock Point, a source of considerable amusement, also the scenic anchorage of Caladh Harbour where the two Kyles meet.



The Maids of Bute



Caladh Harbour opposite Buttock Point

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Beyond the narrows of the Burnt islands we rounded Buttock Point to discover that the Maids of Bute were two women turned to stone whilst waiting in vain for their men to return from the sea. However, they have now been painted and look like a couple of clowns. It was too early to stop for lunch at Caladh, and with the picturesque towns of Tighnabruaich and Kames on our starboard, we were now able to tack gently southwards down the West Kyle in glorious sunshine picking up a spare mooring for lunch just short of Ardlamont Point. Two Shrimper 21s joined us and a group of four others motor-sailed past, no doubt hoping to pick up a stronger wind beyond the headland for the remaining 8 miles to Tarbert.



Shrimpers passing Ettrick Bay



Samphire looking serene on Lower Loch Fyne

We too had to motor sail out of the West Kyle and gave the rocky point a wide berth before heading north again on Lower Loch Fyne. We joined *Samphire*, *Lucy* and *Blue Moon*, but alas the wind stayed light throughout the afternoon. By 1600 we were approaching Tarbert, undoubtedly one of the most picturesque harbours in the Western Isles, and a bucket list-destination for many sailors. The Shrimper fleet filled the pontoon on the shore side of the marina and the facilities were five-star, so plenty of time to relax before the group BBQ on the quay side looking across to Royal Tarbert Castle on the hill above the town. After a day of sailing there's nothing like an Aberdeen Angus beef burger washed down with a glass or two of malt whiskey, unless you are a teetotal vegetarian!



Four up in a Shrimper 19



ISW Shrimper fleet tied up at Tarbert Marina

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Tarbert marina from Royal Tarbert Castle guarding the harbour entrance

DAY 5 Friday 24th June - The good news was that Tarbert was a picture-postcard destination, and after another still night a glorious dawn bathed the town and harbour in a golden light. Alas if we stayed another day as planned, the weekend weather forecast was for very strong winds, and boats staying on Friday would not be able to leave until Monday. We lingered for an hour to visit Royal Tarbert Castle with its spectacular views across the town and departed at 0900 with a southerly wind blowing straight up Loch Fyne.



Shrimper fleet at first light



Picture postcard view of Tarbert harbour

Once again we reduced the crew to three, which turned out to be a wise decision. By the time we passed Kilbride Bay, 5 miles south of Tarbert, waves were racing towards us in ever-bigger sets. After an hour's battering we rounded the marker buoy at Ardlamont Point and surfed into the West Kyle at over 5 knots accompanied by a pod of dolphins. My wife had taken the ferry from Tarbert to Portavadie, and stopped for tea and cake in Portavadie Sailing Club while waiting for the bus to Colintrave. She crossed to Bute by ferry minutes before we came through. And she was on the ferry to Wemyss Bay by the time we reached Rothesay Bay. We just about had an angle for sailing straight home to Largs, which we reached around 1630, a 29 mile passage in 8 hours but half of it motor-sailing. A hot supper was waiting for us at the AirBnB, proving the worth of a shore base and an island-hopping crew member.

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Days 6 and 7 of ISW 2022 were cancelled for sailing as the wind was gusting up to up 34 knots on the Saturday and 40 knots plus on the Sunday, with heavy rain. Also the fleet was now scattered across the isles. The sun still shone on Saturday though, so for us it was a blustery ferry ride across to Great Cumbrae where a bracing walk up to the Glaid Stone provided stunning views of Bute and beyond Kintyre to the Paps of Jura, also the Isle of Arran and Ailsa Craig to the South.



View north up the Firth of Clyde from the Glaid Stone



Cathedral of the Isles

Sunday brought the worst of Scottish weather; so we returned to the Cathedral of the Isles for a concert of traditional Scottish fiddle music performed by a trio from the Glasgow City Orchestra. This was followed by tea and cakes in the library and, a special treat for Cathy, a bell ringer from Lytchett Matravers, who was given the opportunity to ring the Cathedral bells using an Ellacombe mechanism, allowing one person to ring all eight bells if they know the right tunes.

DAY 8 Monday 27th June: Day 8 and it was back to sailing with a 7 mile crossing to Kilchattan Bay on Bute. By 1300, with much tacking, we still had 3 miles to go. Some Shrimpers went on and met the small fleet returning from Tarbert; others, us included, decided we could not make Bute and back in time for a planned visit to Largs lifeboat station at 1700, but we did get a fast goosewing sail home. The Largs RNLI team gave us a highly detailed tour of their station and the opportunity to play in their impressive inshore Atlantic 85 lifeboat, although sadly not crashing through waves at 30 knots! Our visit raised £146.

DAY 9 Tuesday 28th June: The wind and rain came back with a vengeance so we opted to keep it nautical and visited the Scottish Maritime Museum in Irvine. A whole section is devoted to William Fife and Sons of Fairlie, renowned for building fast wooden racing yachts. The day was rounded off by a splendid group meal at Largs Sailing Club, where presentations were made to the organising team, and to individuals for sailing and quizzing achievements.

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DAY 10 Wednesday 29th June: The final morning of ISW 2022 was given over to a 'fun' self-timed race around buoys. The wind was up and the Shrimper 21s with their larger rig were the early leaders. Karen Macey sailing single-handed in *Camaron* (940) made a good challenge for PYC, while *Samphire* (46) from Parkstone YC looked to be going well. However *Blue Moon* (65) from Chichester SC skippered by John Montgomery won the trophy.



Camaron showing off her bottom



Race winner Blue Moon

Was a 1000-mile round road trip from Poole to Largs in order to sail in the Scottish Isles worth it? We needed to be lucky with the weather, and we only lost three sailing days out of ten. Those crews taking advantage of the ISW location to sail the Caledonian and Crinan Canals will have different stories to tell. For us, the passage to Tarbert through the Kyles of Bute was reward for all the effort, and sailing in the company of other Shrimper owners is more fun than sailing on your own. And yes, you can sail four-up in a Shrimper 19. Just about!

Jeff & Geraldine Osment –
Natalie (867)
Cathy & Pete Neyland -
Coffee Bean (929)

