



Polly's Adventures in Scotland : August 2014

Mark and Lisa Pollington



Polly's log

Polly is a 19' Cornish Shrimper. When she grows up she wants to be a Pilot Cutter, but at only three and a half she is seeking adventures trailer sailing to far off places.

This Summer Mark and Lisa took Polly to the small isles off the west coast of Scotland.

Preface:

The trip to the Highlands was in part inspired by our 'back packing' adventures 30 odd years ago on the Knoydart and Moidart peninsulas, ferry trips to the isles of the Inner Hebrides with friends, and family holidays on Lock Carron with my little canoe... So we knew about the rain and the midges! We also knew that May, June or September are supposed to be the best times to visit the Highlands. However, we chose August; a dead time at work for both of us. So after a scorching hot summer we set off on the tail end of Hurricane Bertha! The photos from the first week reveal some fantastically moody skylscapes with more shades of grey than imaginable as clouds broke randomly around us. Then, for the second week, another depression which was reported to be "unusually intense for this time of year" brought a F9 gale followed by a crystal clear 'cold sector' and beautiful cloud streets stretching to the horizon. Blues and silvers were the colours of the second week as the sun came out and lit up the white horses all around our small boat as we ventured well out to sea. The wind got up to 20kts + on every sailing day we were able to venture out of harbour and hardly shifted from the NW. However, the one advantage of the stiff breeze was that we did not see one midge until our last day when a high pressure system took charge again and we left the Highlands bathed in sun and not a breath of wind! Polly is too small to stow a tender and so we usually beach her in sandy harbours to explore. We remembered the acres of deserted sandy beaches from 30 years ago but hadn't appreciated that the beaches were all exposed and the old fishing harbours were generally rocky with limpet encrusted Granite or Basalt walls to scrape the boat against and not at all protected against the swell. However, yacht chartering is now starting to take hold in the Highlands with many new marinas and pontoons to stop off at. Many of these post dated the latest edition of the Imray Pilot books and so the local 'Welcome anchorages' magazine made the most useful guide!

Arriving in Scotland Saturday 9th August

Driving along Loch Etive we could see the swirling waters of the 'falls of Lora' as the water gushed seawards at 7kts! The sun was shining. The mountain ranges of Moidart and Mull coming down to the water, cloud streets overhead streaming in from the west.

Our slipway was the next turning; into Dunstaffnage marina. We had been on the road for under 12 hours and averaged just under 50mph which was quite remarkable towing a heavy Cornish Shrimper.

The forecast for the following days wasn't good so we sat on the balcony of the "Wide Eyed Frog" with our haddock and chips and savoured the sun and mountain view.

We rigged and got the boat on the mooring in brighter spells the following day and went sight seeing while the wind howled and rain fell. We were going to have to set off on Tuesday or the wind was going to veer so we would be beating for the rest of the week!

Our improvised tent tarpaulin worked well and I worked my way through the 'Great Guitar Chord Book' as we sat and watched the rain from our little cabin!

Photos right, top & bottom: same view, different days







Dunstaffnage - Tobermory: Tuesday 12th August

We woke up to rain again, and went to get a cappuccino from the 'Wide Eyed Frog' where there was a good wifi signal to allow us to access the weather forecasts. We determined to set off when the rain stopped. With 2 reefs we headed out into 20kts, the grey only broken by the white horses! Our tidal timing was perfect beating with tide out of the lorn of Lynn and then rounding Eilean Musdile Lighthouse as the tide turned to take us up the Sound of Mull. However, a front coming through part way up the sound of Mull veered the wind back onto the nose and brought rain. As the storm passed the water gushed off the mountainside to the East plunging 1000ft over the cliff into the sea below.



Passing Loch Aline at 15:30 did not look very appealing and so onto Tobermory we sailed, taking the shifts as the next cloud burst. A pattern emerged. Grey. Rain. Grey. Rain. Until at 17:00 we figured we had better get the engine on if we were to make it for pub food in Tobermory. The visibility approaching Calve Island, the exceedingly narrow 'other entrance' to Tobermory was no more than a hundred yards. So much for the church spire acting as the leading line! We never did see the posts marking the rocky outcrops!



We tied onto the pontoon, got the 'tent' cover up and made for the pub! Another group of sailors, harbour bound for a few days entertained everybody with Scottish folk songs accompanied with Guitar, Banjo and Lute(?). Another sailor had his bagpipes which given the volume are a solo instrument in a pub setting!



Tobermory - Carna Island Wednesday 13th August

Wednesday was to be a leisurely day: We had a Whisky tasting session at the Tobermory distillery (the stills were being taken away by lorry to be replaced, as they only last 10-20 years. Hence no tour!) Tobermory is a lovely fishing village not too spoilt by the tourist industry. We planned the route to Mallaig, via the small isles, in a little 'kiddie style' cafe taking the most of a 3 day break in the weather.

We set sail to find a secluded anchorage in loch Sunart. Past Oronsay, the Island after which our friends Keith and Nicky's boat is named and round the back of Carna Island into an amazing pool accessible via a narrow rocky channel. We had a three course dinner with salmon bought in Tobermory.

Lisa did some water colours and I studied our walking maps from thirty years ago: It was interesting to see that where there were crofts, then marked as ruins, there now stands new homes: The highlands are being repopulated by tourists, new age hippies and the semi retired.

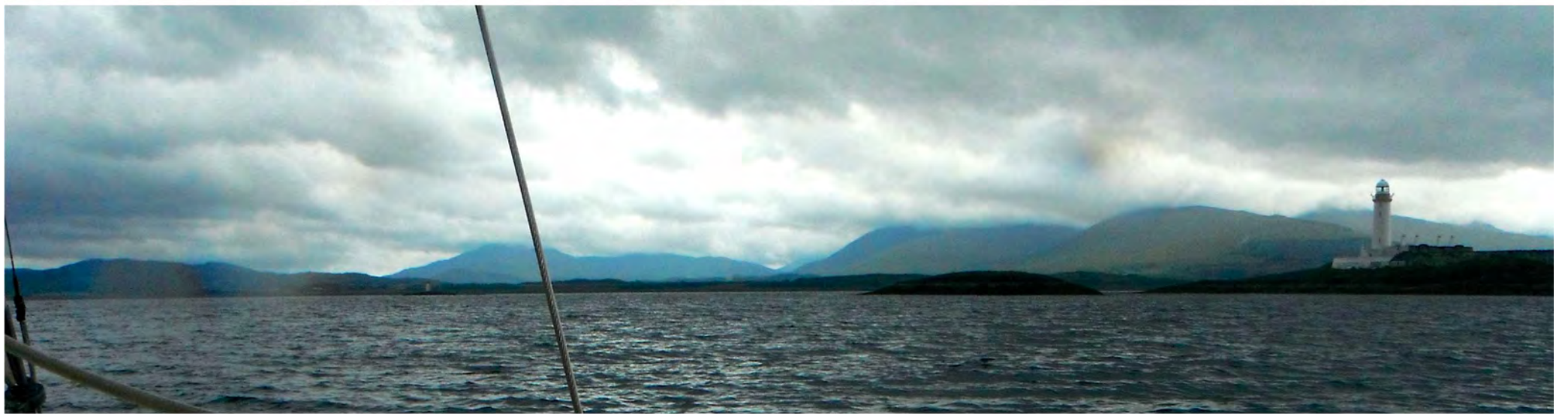


Carna Island - Muck

Waking on Thursday the wind has shifted to the Northwest and the early morning mist give way to little breaks of blue sky. The birds on the rocky ridge that protect our pool were nearly awash as the tide reached high water; our cue to head on out to sea...

Motoring out of Loch Sunart we spotted a cormorant spreading its wings to dry in the sun. On closer inspection there was a colony of seals basking on the rocks. We headed over and they came out to take a closer look at us!





Thursday 14th August

The Ardnamurchan peninsula lay between us and our destination; island of Muck 18 miles to windward. We sailed two long legs; the first along Mull's north shore, which looked magnificent in the sun, then heading due north past Ardnamurchan lighthouse out to the isles of Eigg, Muck, and Rum in the distance. Rum's two Munroes forming an impressive looking saddle. Progress was slow beating against the tide, but slowly the islands became more distinct until we could pick out other boats anchored in Mor Harbour.

A fishing boat showed the way in between two entrance posts, marking the gap in a rocky reef. Inside, a new ferry pontoon has been built to service Muck. The ferry must be bigger than I remembered from thirty two years ago! We anchored well inside, and watched fishermen swapping boats and boys fish from the pier.

It had been an eight hour sail covering 24 miles (not counting several miles of adverse tide) and we were ready for dinner. Four courses! Soup. Risotto. Salad and mackerel. Flambéd Banana and chocolate gallettes. Flambéing bananas on an open flame is with hindsight not to be recommend as the banana juices clog up the gas holes! Still it was all very tasty! It was too late to go ashore to explore. The moon came out and entrance marks twinkled far out to sea. The boat just touched on the sandy bottom at low water.



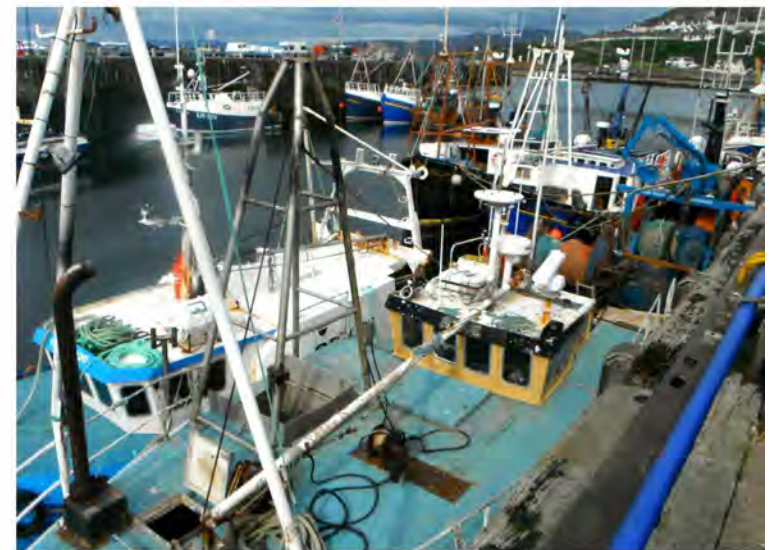


Above: Muck Harbour and approaches

Muck - Mallaig Friday 15th August

17 miles to the North East lay Mallaig, our destination for Friday. With a 15kt breeze an easy fetch just off the wind, and with Eigg on the transit we decided to stop off for a quick nosey round. The new, larger, ferry entered Mor harbour as we left and then was entering Eigg harbour as we arrived! The ferry's engines threw up a massive cross current as we passed between the narrow entrance to the old boat harbour. We moored alongside an old wooden motor vessel (maybe an original ferry boat?) in a stone quay.

Onwards to Mallaig... We had visited the port of Mallaig 30 years ago on a walk along the Knoydart peninsula from Fort William to Inverie, catching the Inverie to Mallaig ferry. (the ferry boat was little bigger than Polly and the skipper carried the daily post in his back pocket). Mallaig brought back memories of deep fried Haggis and chips and an industrial town which we were glad to get out of on the train back to Fort William! How times have changed: the train journey has been made famous as 'Hogwarts Express' and Mallaig has found tourism. B&Bs, cafés and restaurants now mix with an active fishing port and shipyard (two trawlers were undergoing repairs on the slip opposite our berth on the brand new pontoon.). However, due to local hostility to modernity the shower block is not due to be finished until 2015; too long for Lisa to hold on for a shower, so we made our way to the 'seaman's mission' where showers can be procured for £2.50. We did not enquire about other services. It was very clean with green stone flooring. A trawler crewman hung around outside as if locked in another world and time.





Eigg's old harbour lies crumbling

Storm Bound in Mallaig Saturday 16th August

We were now storm bound in Mallaig while a depression passed through. To be fair we could have set out on the Saturday, but there was nowhere within a day's passage of Mallaig that had shelter from the predicted NW F9. Nowhere that one could get off the boat at least, and Lisa refused to hold up at the head of Loch Nevis while the storm passed. Instead we took a ferry trip(!) to Inverie, quiet possibly on the same boat that we had used some 30 years early for the reverse journey. The owner was adamant that it was. He had recently purchased her off the previous owner. Her keel was laid in 1946, finished several years later, and had previously plied the route to the outer isles, before many years on the current Loch Nevis route. The present owner proudly showed us his newly refurbished vessel with added central cabin - like a big dog house - that, including down below, can take 80 people. Why do practical things, like dog houses, look so ugly? Still we were glad for shelter on the return in 25kts with seas breaking over the bow!





We retraced our journey of 30 years earlier on the Inverie Ferry. Seals like the fishing boats in Mallaig!



Storm bound in Mallaig - view over to Skye

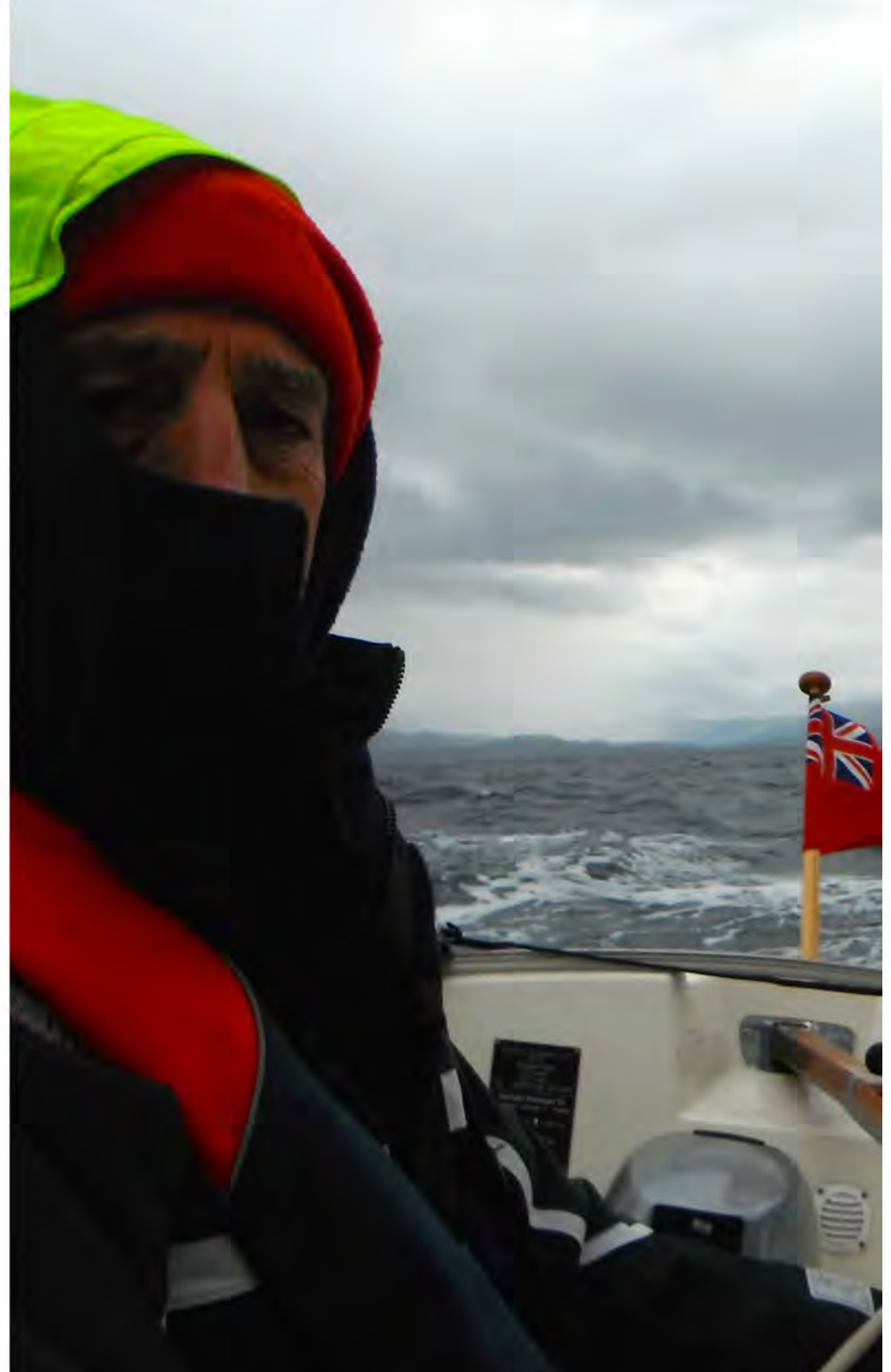
Mallaig - Rum Monday 18th August

The F9 didn't come till the Sunday evening. Mallaig is exposed in a Northerly and the swell was sending the pontoons in a big 'Mexican wave'. The wind had not abated much by the morning and so getting out of bed was difficult! Still, we couldn't spend another day in port. So over we trotted to the 'seaman's mission' for a shower and full Scottish breakfast. We might not see proper facilities for some days.

Lisa stood at the top of the pontoon watching the white horses in the sound. Down to 25kts but still quite a swell but, more importantly, predicted to continue dropping.

We made good progress with two reefs on the fetch out to the Point of Sleat. However, out of the shelter of the sound the waves were bigger and the wind backed making Rum a beat. Worse still, half way across, the wind picked up significantly. We had to shorten sail, but we only had two reefing lines rigged. Part furling the jib didn't work and the boat was making no headway with a flogging main.

Right: Mid summer in the highlands!



40 Kts in the Sea of the Hebrides!

We decided to get the main down and motor, but found we made no headway under engine either as the prop spent half it's time out of the water as it came up over one wave down into the next. Mark used the first reefing lines to rig the third reef and then Polly proceeded with the most minute main sail. We were still overpowered, but just about making headway: tacking through 90 degrees, but with an extra 20 degree leeway due to the excessive, but unavoidable, heel. Another yacht passed nearby (they later reported that they were recording sustained periods of 40kts apparent wind on their anemometer). It took an hour to get into harbour. The wind staying up all the time.

We beached the boat in the sand next to the old harbour wall and went off to explore, quite exhausted from our experiences; a 3 hour sail having taking 5 hours.





Rum

Rum must have the highest proportion of craft shops per capita anywhere in the UK. We really should have taken more than a tenner on our walk as all we were able to return with was a wooden block candle holder! One nice chatty, young lady had laid her hand made woollen items out in a caravan and offered free tea and coffee for visitors. There was a castle, open from 11:00 - 15:00, a new 20 person rather grand looking bunk house under construction and loos with hot showers right by the old harbour! Grant money does buy some strange things! With 'Yes' posters and national flags everywhere the Highland Scots do not appear to be reading the plaques for these schemes describing who is subsidising their lifestyle!

We ate before the tide came back in allowing us to float off to find an anchorage for the night. It was dark when we lit the anchor 'hurricane' lamp, only to find its bottom had rusted through and so it went out rather quickly!

Manx Shearwaters roosting in island burrows started to cackle and shriek like Banshees. A very eerie sound indeed.

Rum - Coll Tuesday 19th August

It made a change to be woken up by the sun! (Lisa will point out that there are lots of other noises that serve to wake her up when at anchor, but I have ear plugs and don't normally bother unless instructed to do so.) We had fried bacon and potato for breakfast and set off for Coll on a broad reach in 20kts: Nice waves in an open sea. 27 miles in 5 hours must be something of a record for a Shrimper. Rum's mountains passed by constantly showing new views as we caught the convergent breeze close by the shore. Then past the two volcanic plugs of Eigg which changed colour as clouds streamed by. We saw the much gentler, lush, green side of Muck before Coll started to grow larger. The distant shore of Knoydart and Ardnamurchan were now also bathed in sunlight. We started to dry out from the day before, even though the northerly wind still required many layers of fleeces.

The water off Coll boiled as the depths reduced and Lisa spotted a basking shark filtering the fast moving water; now just five miles to our anchorage in Loch Earthana. We hadn't realised just how windy it was until we came into the wind to take the sails down, nor did we realise just how little protection from the wind Coll's low lying terrain offered.







Left: Leaving Rum behind.

Above: Approaching Coll; the sea boils and a basking shark filters the fast moving water.



Sunshine on Coll!

"Coll is famous for its hours of sunshine" our brochure stated. We weren't sure how far this fame had spread as 10 layers of clothing would still be required against the wind even if the offending clouds did pass over before being held up on Ardnamurchan some 15 miles away. The island's buildings look quite austere, but I doubt if they care with the view that they have. Sitting in the cabin surveying the scene over to Mull was quite idyllic. One advantage of our little boat is that rather than going 'down below' we simply go further forwards and can actually see out of the back hatch.) The flat topped sheer sided volcanic outcrops of the 'Treshnish Isles' broke the horizon. Staffa (where Fingal's cave could be found if we had enough cruising range left) lay tantalisingly beyond.







Coll - Tobermory Wednesday 20th August

We set the alarm for the 05:15 shipping forecast. (No modern comms out here!) NW 4-6 veering NE becoming cyclonic. Our destination was Tobermory to the NE so we needed an early start otherwise we would end up beating again or worse still beating in the rain again! We were gone by 7:00, the islands to the west of Mull glistening in the glorious sunshine. It was a very quick 13 mile close reach to Ardmore point, then round the corner to Tobermory. We moored up next to 'Black Sheep' another Shrimper from the South Coast. He was with his young son and had also towed up to Dunstaffnage.

Becoming tourists again we set off to discover Tobermory, coming across an art gallery/recording studio where a dark comedy, 'The Weepers' set in Duart Castle was being screened. Very good it was too. Unfortunately, it had now set in to rain for the evening! We sheltered in the pub to download forecasts etc and then cooked in our boat. The couple on the adjacent finger pontoon, Nick and Lynsey, took pity on us trying to rig our 'tent' in the rain and invited us in for drinks. They were semi retired and circumnavigating Britain. Needless to say the Tobermory Whisky came out and we didn't get an early night! We consequently missed our early departure for the run with tide down the Sound of Mull the following day.



Tobermory - Clachan Sound Thursday 21st August

Having missed the tide, we waited for the rain to pass before setting out on a run down the Sound of Mull: 5kts in the 20kt breeze snaking its way round the turns in the channel. The scenery passing by was quite spectacular. We passed close by Duart Castle, the star of the film, looking austere on the headland. There were significant standing waves as the two streams from Mull and Morvern converged. Keeping the shrimper surfing down the waves was quite a handful and a little too exciting for Lisa. To avoid having to sail dead down wind we reached out to Ladies rock, so called because a lord Lachlan McLean had left his lady on the rock on a rising tide after an argument! (Presumably not one about the merits of a lie in "because we are on holiday" versus the "well we'll miss the favourable tide"!) Anyway, the Lady all those years ago was rescued by a McDonald kinsman passing in a fishing boat. (Lisa looked for her rescuer!) It was too late to turn back to Lock Don to find an anchorage to view the castle and so we continued to the Bridge over the Atlantic and Clachan Sound. Approaching the narrow channel, half a cable wide, downwind in a big sea was a little disconcerting, but once in it was like entering another world. Four Herons flew around us as we motored into the narrow break between mainland UK and the isle of Seil. We slid under the famous arch bridge with just a meter headroom to spare and moored up in the pool beyond. The tranquility of our pool in sharp contrast to the 6 1/2 hour downwind bareknuckle ride. Salmon (again) for dinner and an early night. We had not yet figured how best to get out of here and whether a circumnavigation of Seil was plausible given the tides.







Clachan Sound - Oban Friday 22nd October

As the sun rose we wound our way passed rocks and kelp beds motoring downstream through the Clachlan Sound. (It had been our intent to exit the way we came in to avoid the 7kt tide race of the Cuan Sound, but the tide was too strong to motor against and the water falling too rapidly to risk getting stranded.) The tranquillity of the enclosed waters inland of the small islands of Luing and Shuna made a sharp contrast to the 20kts and big seas the other side. We sailed to Craobh for lunch then retraced our steps under the bridge over the Atlantic to avoid a beat against tide in 20Kts! (The weather has not changed in a fortnight 20+kts on every day from the NW. The only variable being how much rain!).

Jack 'Facetimed' us from America while in the 'Giving Tree' cafe in Craobh. He had some exciting news! (The internet kept giving up just at crucial moments and so he had the rest of the cafe holding on in anticipation as he spoke.) His graduation film had been accepted for a Hollywood film festival screening where the film industry big guns would be in attendance. He was really excited and couldn't wait to tell us.



Oban - Dunstaffnage Saturday 23rd August

We moored at Kerrera for our final evening afloat, where there was a convenient water taxi over to Oban for an evening meal. The next day we caught the Criagnure ferry to visit Duart Castle and had a 'tourist' day.

It was only a short fetch back to the Dunstaffnage marina in the evening to recover the boat and prepare for the trip to 'The South'.

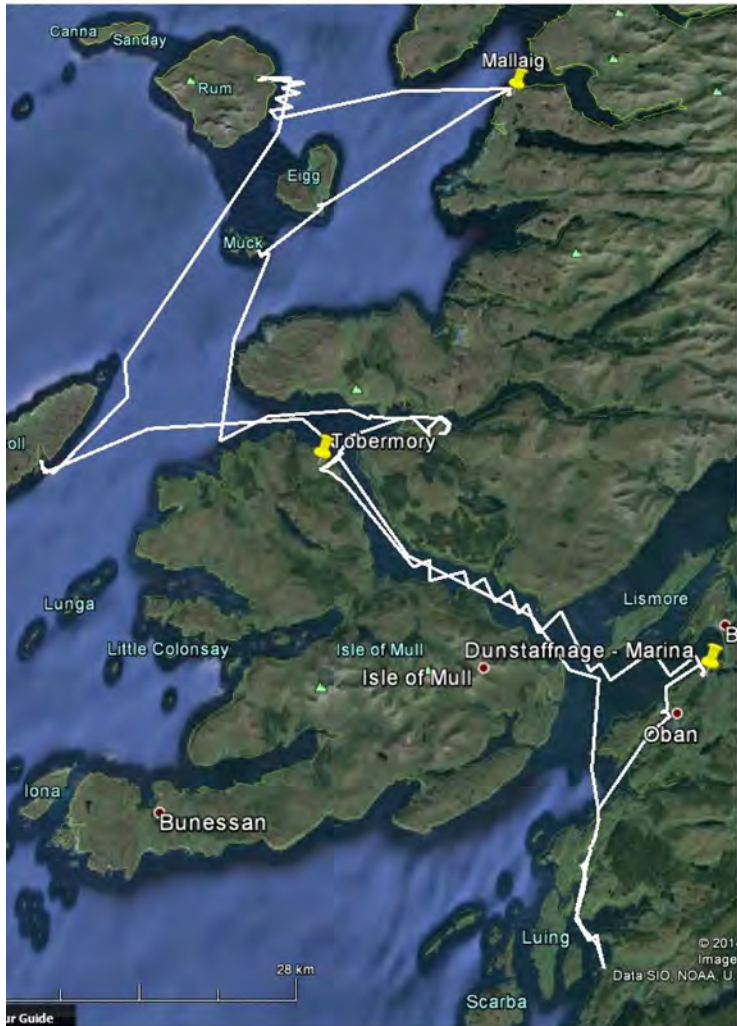
Sleeping aboard Polly on dry land we awoke to the first still day and full blue sky. A high had settle over Scotland! We hadn't seen a midge during the whole journey, they can't fly against 20kts, but they were certainly out that morning!

What a memorable 'character building' trip it had been. Mark wants to return in a bigger boat very soon, but it may take a little while for Lisa to forget the cold, the wind and rain!





Above: A high pressure system settles over the Highlands as we head home. The wind having gone, the midges come out!



Day August 2014	Destination	Distance (NM)	Cumulative Distance (NM)	Description
	Dunstaffnage			Launch slipway
Tuesday 12 th	Tobermory	32 MN	32 MN	Yacht Haven
Wednesday 13 th	Carne Isle	11 MN	43NM	Anchorage
Thursday 14 th	Muck	26 NM	69 NM	Anchorage
Friday 15 th	Mallaig	20 NM	89 NM	Harbour
Monday 18 th	Rum	20 NM	109 NM	Anchorage
Tuesday 19 th	L. Eatharna, Coll	31 NM	140 NM	Anchorage
Wednesday 20 th	Tobermory	19 NM	159 NM	Yacht Haven
Thursday 21 st	Clachan Soundo	28 NM	187 NM	Anchorage
Friday 22 nd	Kerrera, Oban	22NM	209 NM	Yacht Haven
Saturday 23 rd	Dunstaffnage	5 MN	214 NM	Slipway
	Total	10 days	214 NM	50% Anchorage

Polly's highland / island route





Lisa!

Polly's Adventure's in Scotland!