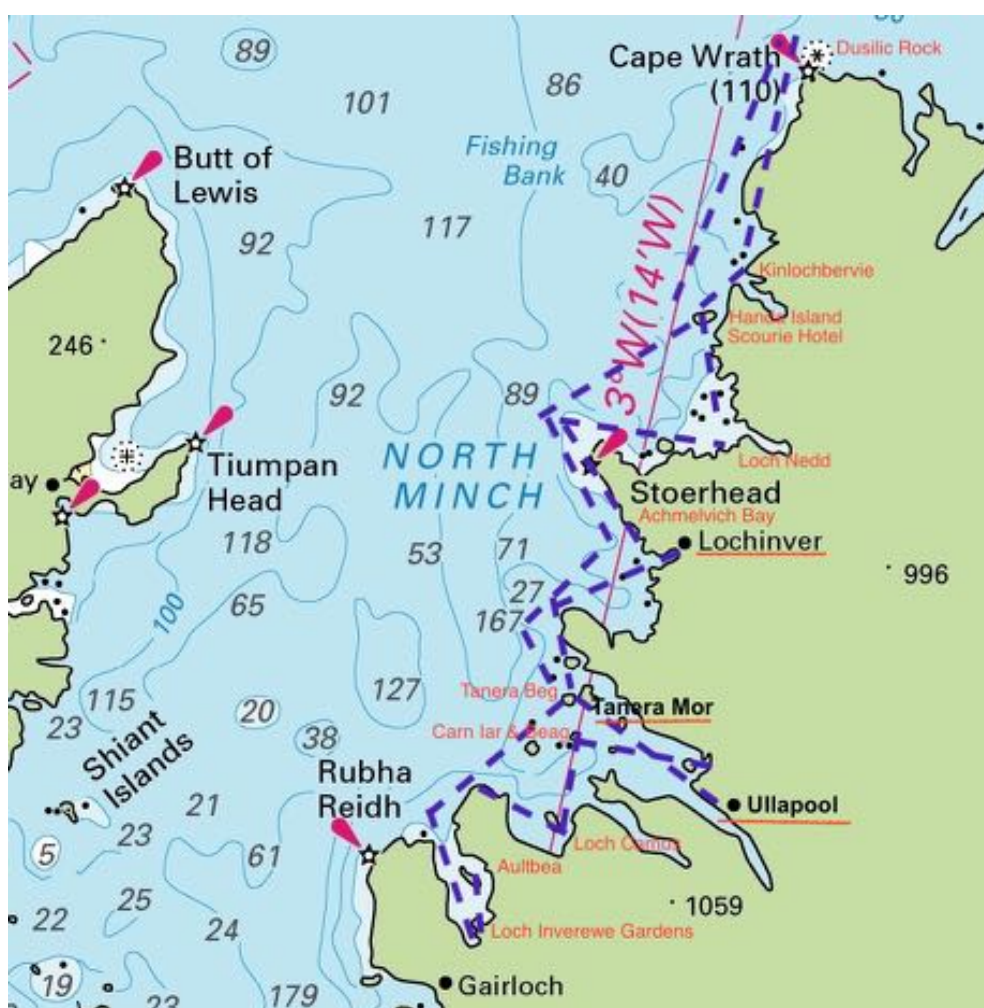


## Summer Isles, North Minch and Cape Wrath by Fiona Frossell



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*'70% chance of rain, northerlies gusting in excess of 23 knots'*, this was the forecast for every day of our planned week in early July, a rather bleak outlook. Undeterred, my plucky first mate Kate Clark Kennedy, and I made our descent into Ullapool, towing *Dipper of Lorne* (422) my 19 foot Mark 1 Cornish Shrimper, to explore the Summer Isles, taking in Handa to the North and Isle Ewe to the south.

Over my weeks of winter planning, Malcolm, the assistant harbour master, had helpfully talked through launching from the excellent slip at the Ullapool Sailing Club, with parking at the town car park and reassuring me space would be found for the trailer 'somewhere!' As we rigged *Dipper*, Paul, the commodore and Jamie, made us very welcome as they prepared for their young sailors sailing week. A problem free launch, the trailer helpfully stowed at the club, we secured *Dipper* on the pontoons. We then made a quick tour of Ullapool's shops, usefully an 'Aladdin's cave' hardware shop with everything from caulk to midge nets, (who doesn't need a net for midges?) an excellent deli, wine merchant, outdoor shop, Tesco and a fine book shop with a rich offering of local literary gems.

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With a couple of piping hot pasties, oilies on, we slipped our mooring and headed west up Loch Broom passing Horse Island to the east then north around Meall nan Gabhar. We sailed across the east bay of Tanera Mor admiring the luxury retreat from afar. Continuing round Tanera Mor to the north we weaved through the rocks and islands to a serene anchorage at Tanera Beg, nestling in a sheltered bay on the east side of the north west headland. As space is very restricted in a Shrimper, we always tow our tender, enabling us to row ashore on a whim. Our walk on Tanera Beg was a delight, rich with lichens and brimming with orchids, pink, white and purple. On returning to *Dipper* the spectacle of richly coloured gold and purple jellyfish made a joyful end to our first day.



*Kate at the helm departing Ullapool and our serene anchorage at Tanera Beg  
Orchids on Tanera Beg and gold and purple jellyfish*



Fresh from a good night's sleep we headed north, sailing between Isle Ristol and Eilean Mullagrach round the Rubha Coigeach headland. Identifying the peaks of the highland panorama notably Suilven, Cul Mor and Stac Pollaidh, provided enjoyable entertainment on our beam reach east across Enard Bay, arriving at the functional pontoons at Lochinver fish sheds. Two rivers flow energetically through the village into the loch, dividing Lochinver into three hamlets. Postcards and provisions purchased, we indulged in an utterly delicious dinner at Delilah's, enjoying foraged mushrooms and seafood.

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*Weaving through the Summer Isles and passing Old Man of Stoeur*

Up for an early tide, sails hoisted, we passed the 70 metre Old Man of Stoeur with a rolling 3 metre sea and a good westerly - a stimulating sail. Rounding Stouer Head we followed the bay skirting Oldany Island, picnicking in the gently wooded Loch Nedd. The afternoon's sail north took us



between Calbha Beag and Calbha Mor, weaving our way through the Badcall Islands where we were entertained by a large colony of playful seals. We resisted the call of the Badcall Hotel with our sights on Handa Island, reassured by the ranger that access was unrestricted. What a gem of an anchorage, azure seas, white sand, a few treasured cowrie shells and birds, birds, birds!

*Handa Island*



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The rangers accepted an invitation to experience supper on board *Dipper*, so following a relaxing walk ashore, we rendezvoused with Libby and Leah on the Port an Eilean beach. We ferried our guests precariously on *Dipper's* tiny tender, with one perched on the transom and one on the bow as Kate and I took to the oars. They were very appreciative of our 'chilli con carne' as their fridge-less bothy meant meat was a rare treat.

These two bright young 20 somethings chatted joyfully about life on the island from April to September, interrupting their tales to inform us about the birds flitting around us, varied terns, brown and great skua among them all. Chocolate seemed to go down well as pudding and we returned them to shore in the still light skies. *Handa Island Rangers*



As the evening shadows lengthened and the rich green contours highlighted the gentle landscape of Handa, Kate and I discussed the weather, light westerlies, veering WNW. Fortified by a little wine we were emboldened, 'could it be that we might actually be able to fulfil an ambition to round the infamous Cape Wrath?'

We awoke to bright sunshine, and sailed north, stopping at Kinlochbervie to take on both diesel and water. Harbour hand Hugh, was very patient filling our 5-litre jerry can from an industrial size nozzle, cheerfully dashing backwards and forwards along the dock as the fuel control kept timing out. We sought provisions from the well-stocked village shop and invested in some delicious 'Bannock Cake' before returning to our expedition!



*Cape Wrath*

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The gentle sail up the sunny coastline was enriched by the fascinating landscape, sea stacks and outcrops, with the distant Cape Wrath lighthouse sitting neatly on the cliff. As the headland approached the sea's chop increased, slapping out what little life there was in *Dipper's* sails. We reluctantly resorted to some motor assistance! A solitary yacht, approaching from the northeast, seemed to be having similar difficulties. A heartening wave passed between boats as they continued their southerly course. There is little freeboard on a Mark 1 Shrimper, barely eighteen inches, so the swell, chop and every wave of the North Minch felt close at hand.

We rounded Cape Wrath and took in the distinctive northern headland in its full glory, in celebration we sang a rousing chorus of Auld Lang Syne, and drank a toast to life. Loch Eriboil was tempting for an overnight anchorage but conscious of the unsettled weather this seemed foolhardy. We contented ourselves with a circumnavigation of Duslic Rock, tacking to head back south.



*Rounding Cape Wrath Selfie*

On returning to more settled seas we hoisted the asymmetric sail. This involves tying and retying the head tack and clew several times to ensure all goes to plan, then scrunching the spinnaker in both hands throwing it up to leeward much as one might a homing pigeon or confetti at a wedding. In full sail we retraced our steps, relaxed and cheery from our expedition.

As if to cap off the moment six bottlenose or possibly white beaked dolphins leaped simultaneously 30 meters ahead of the bow as if pulling us along. This performance was repeated and then in total synchronicity for their finale, having turned 90 degrees, they all leapt clear of the water in perfect head to tail arcs as if a paper chain in silhouette, sadly none of this performance was captured other than in our memories.

Winds remained light and by mid-afternoon we hove to at the stack to the west of Handa. We were mesmerized by the extraordinary spectacle of birds wheeling and diving as they flew back and forth to their nesting sites. The acoustics were fabulous as the chorus of bird call reverberated off the rock.

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Continuing to Scourie we anchored for a walk to the Scourie Hotel, a favourite with the fishing fraternity. In the warm comfort of their lounge we indulged in an enormous G&T and relived our momentous day before returning to the charm of Handa to bunk down.

*Cliffs on the west side of Handa Island*



The next day was glorious sunshine with a steady 10 knot NW breeze. We enjoyed an idyllic reach south around Stouer then clinging to the coast to visit the pretty Bay of Clachtoll and the white sands of Achmelvich Bay. Both were bustling with families enjoying the beaches on this rare warm sunny summer day. The seas around the headland of Rubha Coigeach and Min were very easy as we continued our sail south intending to anchor at Isle Ristol.

Finding the anchorage roly we weighed anchor and settled in the tranquillity of Eilean na Saille on the north west of Tanera Mor where we were treated to the most glorious golden late-night sunset.

*Anchorage at Eilean na Saille*



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Day six we set sail for Loch Ewe to visit the delightful National Trust Garden of Inverewe House. Grey skies and stronger winds from the northwest required a double reef for our sail south past Eilean Dubh, and Priest Island. The seas were quite wild rounding Greenstone Point and we anxiously rode the surf on a broad reach down the coast. Butterflies were building as I nervously prepared for the gybe into Loch Ewe. I concentrated on the rhythm of the waves and gusts trying to time when to depower whilst avoiding broaching. Thankfully safely gybed, we had an easier reach to the head of Loch Ewe.

Anchoring at Carnas Glas, one enters the Inverewe House Gardens (pictured) by meandering up through the charming woodland, to reach the reception to pay. The walled garden includes some stunning wrought iron gates and handrails, designed by Kevin Ball, the head gardener and made by the blacksmith Phil Johnson, at Ratho Byres Forge near Edinburgh. Within these gates lay the healthy delicious vegetables beds intermingled with an abundance of flowers and a glorious rose avenue. We anchored that night at Camas Phail and were inspired to cook a cheese fondue supper accompanied by joyful highland music.



As we departed Loch Ewe we visited Aultbea where we stocked up with a rich assortment of local produce from the excellent village shop. We then made an impromptu visit to Isle Ewe to meet Alasdair Grant of Isle Ewe Boat yard, who specialises in restoring wooden boats. They were hard at work with two yachts including a Loch Fyne Skiff and a Fife Classic.

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Returning north around Greenstone we were surprised to spot in the distance, Coastal Odyssey 2024, over half way around their 1,438 NM round Britain Rowing Challenge 2024. We sailed over to meet close at hand this mixed crew of six, who were raising funds for Surfers Against Sewage. We think they achieved a record time, amazing, we cheered them on their way. *Coastal Odyssey*

We romped across Gruinard Bay and anchored at Loch Camuse for some beach football, then headed out to our final excellent anchorage between Carn Iar and Carn Deas. Our walk ashore provided a further sporting opportunity, finding a pair of huge buoys we enjoyed space hopper racing, donating the bouys to the Ullapool Sailing School to the delight of the young sailors.



Our final day began with a foggy sail, taking in Carn Skerries. We were lucky enough to enjoy several harbour porpoise as we rounded Isle Martin in the poorest visibility before our return to haul out in Ullapool. We added to a chaotic scene, the finale of the children's club sailing week and the arrival of eighteen skiffs along with their excited crews for a weekend regatta.



We are full of gratitude to all involved for their patience and hospitality. To our delight we met Daniel Johnson our first RCC member of the week! Our thanks to Dan for kindly repairing our lighting board.

We loved our 190 NM of mixed sailing, mixed weather, laughter, fun, all in 4 layers and 'oilies' every day, and all in the fascinating landscape, stunning coastline and magical waters of the Summer Isles. As we commenced the 580 mile homeward journey, plans for the further adventures with *Dipper* on Scotland's west coast began.



*Beach Football and  
The author at the helm of Dipper of Lorne (422)*