

Another adventure to the Firth of Clyde – Maxine Smith

Starring Shrimper 19 - *Phyllis* (848) Nick Clark as skipper/engineer and Maxine Smith as crew/cook/quartermaster/comms/logistics



In May 2024 we set off with our Shrimper *Phyllis* (848) to the Firth of Clyde for a 2-week trip. We had made the same trip to the Firth of Clyde in 2023 and it was so enjoyable that we decided to return. Shrimpers are well suited to cruising this area as it's relatively sheltered and there are many marinas and anchorages within easy range. For the 2023 trip we had done some research, (using past *Shrimper* magazines and the Imray guide), but once again we couldn't make any concrete plans for our itinerary as we had no idea what the weather was going to throw at us. We had the tide tables to hand in case we went through the Kyles or around Otter Spit or Rhu Point, otherwise it's not necessary to worry too much about tides. So our plans for each day were largely 'made up as we went along'.

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We chose early May as the time to go as the midges aren't in full attack mode and also that's when (according to local skippers) you're most likely to get to St Kilda. We weren't going to St Kilda, that's for another trip, but it's indicative of possibly more 'settled' weather. Once again we used Largs Yacht Haven as our base as it went very smoothly last time and the staff were absolutely amazing. Largs has loads of facilities (chandlers, café, restaurant, workshops, nearby petrol station, just off an A road, no tiny lanes, laundry, showers and washing up facilities). And again, rather than use the slipway, we decided to treat ourselves to a lift in and out as that meant we didn't need to waste any time waiting for sufficient launching water and we didn't have to bring even more rope, launching ramps, and waders.

In case we couldn't easily get to a shop, we packed sufficient meals for the entire trip: mostly Kabuto noodles (24 pots decanted into bags!), Spice Tailor curry kits and tinned veg, fresh and long-life milk, cheese and fruit, wine in a box, a 10 litre water bag plus a few bottles of water, along with a couple of Thermos cold bags plus a very small fridge-freezer. We also brought along an electricity cable so that when we stayed in a marina we could freeze down the cold packs overnight and replace the 'warmed up' cold packs that had been in the bags.

We set off from home at lunchtime on Friday 3rd May, arriving at Largs just after midnight. Fortunately, the marina is open 24 hours and a nice night-watchman directed us to where we could set up. There's a massive amount of space in the marina, for your boat and vehicle plus access to water and electricity.



Largs Yacht Haven and tractor towing Phyllis to the hoist

After the lift-in on Sunday lunchtime 5th May we victualled the boat and loaded the inflatable kayak and paddles, which served as the tender. The inflatable kayak rolled up and fitted underneath the tiller and there was plenty of space for paddles up the front of the boat.

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Packed and provisioned

We spent Sunday night in the marina and set off on Monday 6th May to Brodick on Arran. There were light winds from various directions at the start of the 16 mile sail to Arran, but we knew from last time that sailing in the lochs and Kyles means you have to have a sense of humour as the wind can be fluky, changeable and there's wind funnelling so we were prepared to do a bit of sailing and motoring to reach our destination.



Sailing from Largs to Brodick

This was our first visit to Brodick so we were quite excited. We decided to use one of the council's free mooring buoys for the night, and it was very peaceful. According to Nick there was a bit of rocking in the night (presumably traffic in the Firth of Clyde) but my Garmin sports watch recorded its best night of sleep ever!

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Brodick Bay, Arran and below Holy Isle in Lamlash Bay

Looking ahead, the forecast for Wednesday 8th May predicted a southerly and a good opportunity to sail around the southern end of Arran to Campbeltown. We didn't know how long the nice weather would last so we aimed to get as far south as possible while we could. So on Tuesday 7th May we set off for a short 6 mile sail to Lamlash, which is situated in a lovely bay, protected from easterlies by Holy Isle. There are a few visitor buoys just opposite the town and you can also anchor in various parts of the bay. If you use the buoys then you need to get ashore and pay the chap in the shed *in cash!*



This year we decided to anchor in order to save the faff of finding the man in his shed. We arrived in Lamlash in the early afternoon and we were treated to a dolphin pod display for the next few hours, which was amazing. Later in the evening Nick saw some splashing near the shore and after checking through the binoculars we saw that it was two otters playing. Wow! We watched the otters for about an hour until they stopped playing and went fishing.

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Setting off from Lamlash to Campbeltown was a bit of a battle to get to the southern end of Arran which involved a long tack east, but we sailed the 35 miles in about 8 hours and arrived before the useful people at the marina went home.



Sailing around the southern tip of Arran en route to Campbeltown marina



The marina in Campbeltown is small but has good facilities and the chap who greets you is very helpful. The showers are good and there's a Tesco in town, so we stocked up on fresh food. We also visited the petrol station, as we'd had a diesel leak (a particular screw hadn't been sufficiently tightened) so we needed to top up the spare tank. We had siphoned the diesel into some empty water bottles that just happened to be aboard and we were mightily relieved when we managed to dispose of the diesel in the oil recycling bin on the quay next to the marina. Also that evening, after Nick realised he'd put a pulley block on the wrong way, we took down the mast in the marina, switched around the block and then hoisted the mast again. (Once we took down the mast on a mooring buoy in Fowey so we were well rehearsed!!)

We awoke on Thursday 9th May to beautiful blue skies but not much wind so decided to head back to Lochranza, which is at the northern tip of Arran, about 28 miles away. We had to motor most of the way and it was baking hot.

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It is possible to anchor in Lochranza, but we decided to pick up one of the last two remaining visitor buoys (12 in total). We didn't venture into Lochranza until the next morning when we paddled over and tied the kayak to the community-owned pontoon. The primary reason for going ashore was to visit the Sandwich Station, which is opposite the ferry terminal. It makes the most amazing sandwiches, so we bought one pack to eat there and then another for later. Back on *Phyllis* we hoisted the solar panels and charged the batteries before setting off for a new destination.



Phyllis with her solar panel in Lochranza

Ardmarnock Bay is on the eastern side of Loch Fyne, a distance of about 13 miles. There is an anchorage and we nestled into a very small bay on the southern side of the larger bay, and were the only ones there. At 0100 Nick woke me up as he'd noticed some funny lights in the sky. I got up and could see the glow of the Northern Lights. It was amazing. I've been planning to see the Lights for years, and now I no longer need that trip to Norway in the winter!



Ardmarnock Bay

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On Saturday 11th May we decided to move on and sailed 12 miles to Otter Ferry, another new destination for us with the added excitement of a 1 km long spit that you need to miss, and not everyone does, according to some campers on the beach. There are two huge concrete buoys that mark the channel that leads up the eastern upper Loch Fyne, but the green one has lost its colour somewhat so it was difficult to find the mark from a distance through the binoculars.



*Motoring around Otter Spit and view from our mooring at Otter Ferry village
Walking along Otter Spit at low water and tied up at Tarbert marina*



There are about 10 visitor buoys or you can anchor further north of the beach where the pub is. We picked up one of the more inshore buoys. It was a very hot day again and I hadn't packed any T-shirts so I cooled down by going for swim around the boat. It was quite cold - about 12 degrees C !

The next day, Sunday 12th May we sailed 13 miles to Tarbert, which we visited last year and really enjoyed. As we were approaching Tarbert, the skipper of a nice old motorboat that was overtaking shouted how lovely *Phyllis* looked, so that made our day. We berthed at Tarbert marina (which has the best showers on on the Firth of Clyde) and then headed into town for a coffee and Cullen Skink, which is smoked haddock and potato soup. On the way back I bought a T-shirt from the chandlery.

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On Monday 13th May it was time to move again. We had a short 5 mile sail from Tarbert to Asgog Bay, on the east side of Loch Fyne, but further south than Ardmarnock Bay. This bay was much larger than Ardmarnock, but we were the only boat in there again. We anchored for the night as it was extremely sheltered from the fresh northerlies. In hindsight it would have been more pleasant to have stayed put in Asgog Bay than to move again, but we wanted to try out St Ninian's Bay as an anchorage which is on the west side of Bute, about 8 miles away.

We had a good point of sail but it was raining and visibility was quite poor, so the T-shirt stayed in the rucksack and the oilies and wellies were put on. The sail was quite grim and damp, although we were pleased that we didn't have to tack up the Kyles. At St Ninian's Bay we found a suitable depth in which to anchor and although the sea state was only small wavelets, a fresh wind howled over Bute, so we felt somewhat exposed. Eventually the rain stopped and the wind abated so I erected the boom tent and hooked it down the sides of the boat. Two other yachts joined us in the bay, so it must be a well-known anchorage.



St Ninian's Bay

By this time we only had one more night before we had to get back to Largs, so we chose to go to another new place for us, Port Bannatyne marina on the east side of Bute. To get there we had to sail up the western Kyle and down the eastern Kyle, a journey of about 19 miles. The only bit of planning we did last year was to know when we could go through the point where the two Kyles meet, as it is tidal. This year, we had a look and the tide was only slightly against us so we went for it, and it turns out to be not that scary! We put the motor on briefly, just to go around the corner, but sailed most of the way. There's a ferry at Colintrave but luckily we didn't get in its way. A top tip when sailing in the Firth of Clyde area is that it pays to know which way the nearest ferry is heading at all times as they move quite fast!

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Sailing through the tidal part of the Kyles at Colintraive ferry

It is possible to anchor in the bay at Port Bannatyne, but we fancied some electricity so stayed at the marina. I was slightly disappointed by Port Bannatyne marina as the facilities weren't that good, you had to pay extra to have a shower and the mooring fees per metre were high: the total cost was about the same as spending the night in Largs Yacht Haven which is far superior.



Port Bannatyne marina and Phyllis being hoisted out at Largs

On Thursday 16th May we sailed the 10 miles back to Largs Yacht Haven, managing to dodge the Largs to Cumbrae ferry. We were sad to have this adventure come to an end, although pleased to have discovered new places to visit and there are still more for a possible return in 2025. On this trip we sailed about 165 NM, not bad for a little boat.