

Cool weather in the Hebrides in 2015 for Marie Claire

Seán McCormack

Hot whiskeys while close to a heater in the saloon were the order of the day on the west coast of Scotland during the summer of 2015. On the plus side we enjoyed plenty of very good sailing and the only day lost to weather, due to a fresh northerly wind, was Saturday 13th June our planned departure day from Howth. A five week cruise was planned with crew changes in Mallaig and Oban. Con Moran, Vivienne Cahill and Robert Hayes made up the crew that had to suffer the skipper for their parts of the trip.

The first week gave us fast sailing making stops in Ardglass, Glenarm, Ballycastle and then Port Askaig in the Sound of Islay, Tinkers Hole on Mull, Arinagour on Coll, Dunvegan on Skye's west coast before transiting the Little Minch to the small marina in Stornaway, the capital of Lewis. This was the most northerly point of our cruise and our only stop in the Outer Hebrides.

We departed Stornaway on Tuesday 23rd June, motoring east in a light wind, through a benign North Minch. We arrived in to Loch Inver on the mainland coast, with the weather still dull and cool. The next day was a shore based day, so we took a mini-bus to Durness at the northwest end of Scotland. This trip provided spectacular scenery and was greatly enjoyed by all. The next day saw us make a 2 hour stop in the Summer Isles anchorage of En a Saille, on the northwest corner of Tanera More. In the afternoon we made the 20 mile journey to our night anchorage in Loch Ewe, where we picked up a mooring in Poolewe at the head of the loch. The next morning we moved the short distance and anchored off the landing steps for Inverewe House and Gardens. Perched on a peninsula at the edge of Loch Ewe, Inverewe is regarded as one of the most beautiful gardens in Scotland. Well worth a visit if anywhere in the area. Over the next few days we made calls to Loch Gairloch, Rona, Skye's capital Portree, Plocton on Loch Carron and then under the Skye Road Bridge to tie up at Kyle of Loch Alsh.

Wednesday 1st July promises to be the best day so far, as we head down Kyle Rhea in bright sunshine and with some heat in the air for a change. The plan today is to fulfil an ambition I had for some time and that was to explore the dramatic Loch Houran. This loch is on the east side of the Sound of Sleat and opposite Isle Ornsay LH on Skye. It is a magnificent fiord-like loch with high mountains all round. It is extremely wild and remote and on the day of our visit there was still snow in the valleys near the mountain tops. The two sections of the loch extend to just over ten miles inland and in windy weather are subject to violent squalls. At the first narrows we stopped for a coffee break, as a ten minute electrical storm raged very close to us. This storm produced some very dramatic light and sound effects, as the acoustics within the loch would have been the envy of any concert venue. Very dramatic and might even have been enjoyable, were it not for the twelve metre mast over our heads! Afterwards we proceeded cautiously through the second and third narrows to anchor just short of the fourth narrows on the south side. After lunch in the cockpit we went ashore in the dinghy and went for a walk along a rough path beside the shore. This route was very attractive, heavily wooded and scented with many wild flowers and with breaks from time to time in the heavy foliage offering framed picture views of the loch. Apart from a couple with a dog, there was

no sign of habitation. The night at anchor here was an experience never to be forgotten. We were so lucky to get this one good day to experience this rather special loch.

The next morning was very misty as we made our way back down the loch and had headwinds from the loch entrance to our destination of Mallaig. We found the small marina here nearly full and a new marina facilities building under construction. We stayed three nights here, as Vivienne was leaving on the Friday and Robert Hayes was joining us on Saturday. On Sunday 5th. July we departed Mallaig, with the idea of impressing the newly arrived Robert with a visit to the dramatic anchorage of Loch Scavaig, set deep in the cirque of the black Cuillins on the south side of Skye. Ashore we explored around Loch Coruisk, framed by the Cuillin Ridge-one of the most famous mountain views in Britain. With little wind forecast, we were quite happy to stay the night here, as this anchorage can be dangerous in fresh conditions due to severe downdraughts.

Over the next few days we worked our way south to Oban where Con was leaving us. On the way we enjoyed calls to Rum, Eigg, Tobermorey, Loch Drumbuie, Salen and Loch Ailine. After leaving Oban we were now seriously on our way home with calls to Puilladobhain, Craobh Marina, Gigha, Rathlin, Bangor, Ardglass and then Howth. It was good to be safely home after a challenging cruise in weather that was nothing like summer.

Duration of cruise 33 days
Total cruise distance 811 miles
Pontoon/marina stops 14
Alongside stops 1
Moorings 3
Anchorages 15

Inverness Gardens Loch Ewe



Ashore in Loch Skavaig Skye



Con, Vivienne and Sean ashore in Loch Hourn



Vivienne and Con at Skye Road Bridge



Marie Claire in Loch Skavaig Skye



Kinloch Castle Rum

