



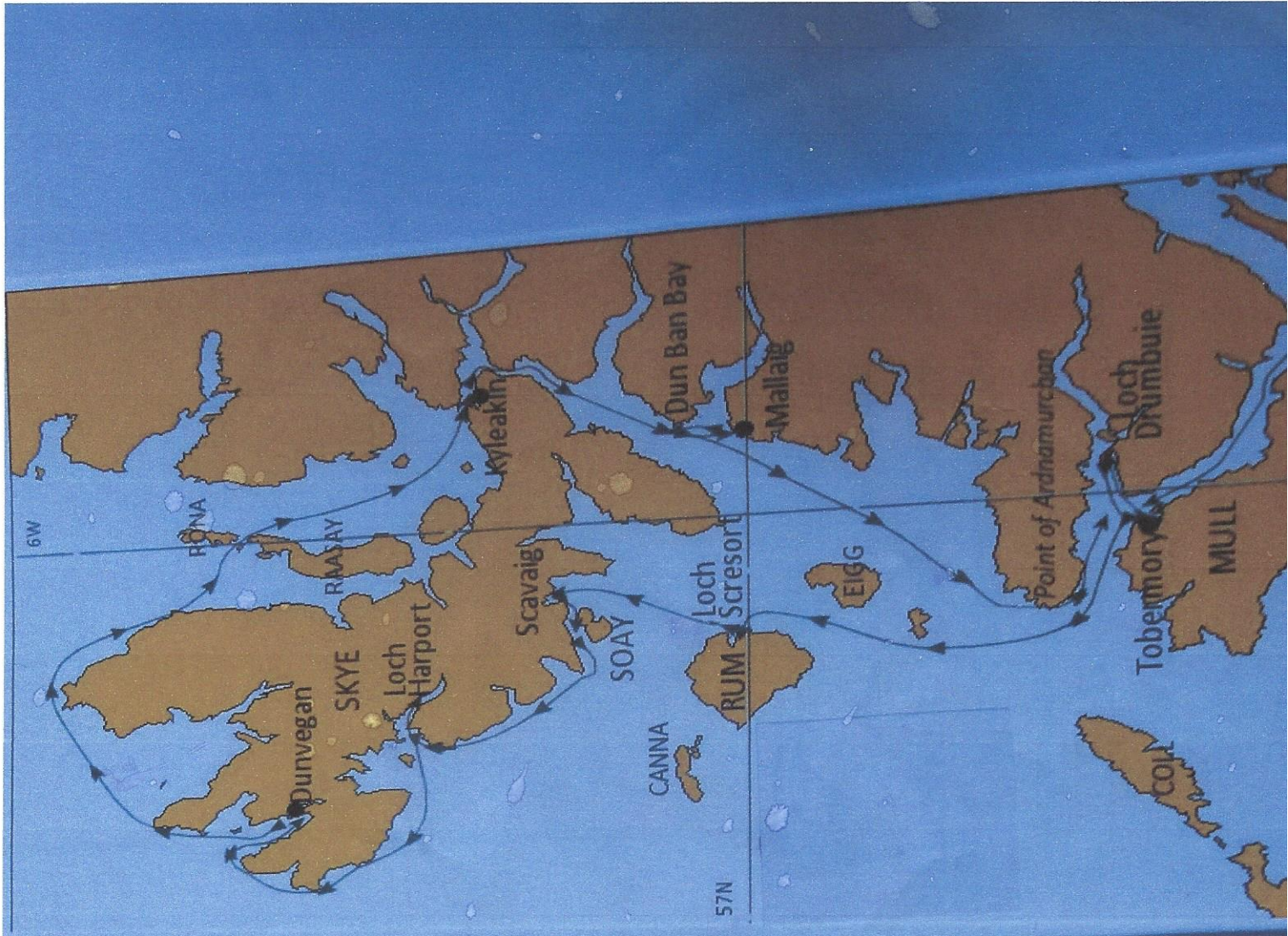
## **Marie Claire's cruise to the Hebrides 2013**

15<sup>th</sup>. June to 20<sup>th</sup>. July

Skipper: Seán McCormack

Crew: (First half) John Ahern & Vincent Dromey  
(Second half) Con Moran & Vivienne Cahill

Photo: Marie Claire on mooring in Fairy Isles, Loch Sween



# Yet another cruise to the Hebrides for Marie Claire

**Seán McCormack**

After experiencing a force 10 in Loch Boisdale on South Uist and some very poor weather during our 2010 cruise of the Hebrides, were we pushing our luck by planning yet another cruise to this one of my favourite cruising grounds?. After the very poor cruising weather of the past 3 years, surely this year would be different.

With these hopeful thoughts in mind, we departed Howth on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June. Long time sailing friends John Ahern and Vincent Dromey were doing the first half of a five week cruise, with a planned crew change in Mallaig, where Con Moran and Vivienne Cahill were to join ship. This was Vivienne's first time to cruise in the Hebrides. With overnight stops in Ardglass and Port Dandy in the Copeland Islands, we then made a tidal stop in Red Bay before berthing in Rathlin Island's handy little marina.

The next morning we realised we had to slow down and adapt to a more leisurely cruising life, as our departure was delayed due to the local shop not opening until the civilised hour of 11.00. We arrived into Plod Sgeiran, a sheltered pool ringed by skerries and islets in the very remote and inaccessible Ardmores Islands, on the southeast corner of Islay. This anchorage, which is teeming with wildlife and home to the second largest colony of common seals in Europe, poses a significant navigational challenge on a first visit. The following day brought us to Ardfern marina near the head of Loch Craignish. That evening we dined and wineed well



Tobermory

Isle of Mull



My granddaughters call it Balamory. It's Tobermory to you and me.

in The Galley of Lorne Inn, where we met up with Dickie Gomes and Brian Law from yacht *Ainmara*.

The following day, Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June, produced a bit of a roller coaster ride, as we came out the tidal gate of the Dorus Mor and then north through the Sound of Luing, to arrive into Oban marina on the island of Kerrera. There is a free ferry service to nearby Oban every hour, which we availed of to dine ashore that evening and also to provision the next morning. In the afternoon we passed Duart Castle and its tidal gate, as we entered the Sound of Mull on our way to the lovely and appropriately named Loch Aline. We tied up at the fairly new pontoons and availed of the new on shore facilities which had only opened three weeks previously.

On the afternoon of Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> June, we continued up the Sound of Mull to the busy and colourful town of Tobermory, where the new pontoons and shore-side facilities are proving very popular. My two grandchildren know this main town of Mull as 'Balamory' from the popular children's television programme. We spent a pleasant two days here in very mixed weather, exploring this sea-side town, with its picture postcard, brightly painted houses and also checking out the liquid fare on offer in the Mish Nish pub. Shortly before our departure, Joe and Trish Phelan arrived on *Lydia* to join John and Sheila O'Reilly's *Wild Again* that was already berthed here. On our way out of the harbour we met *Mystique of Malahide* with Robert and Rose Michael on board. Perhaps we were about to miss out on a good Howth party! We anchored in the beautiful and very sheltered Loch Drumbuie in the mouth of Loch Sunart, where we enjoyed a very pleasant evening and a quiet night. The next morning we returned briefly to Tobermory to provision the boat and take on water and diesel before heading north.



John Ahern tries  
his hand fishing at  
Ardnamurchan L.H.



Kinlough Castle

Isle of Rum

On our way north at mid-day at John's suggestion, we tried a spot of fishing at Ardnamurchan L.H. This effort was only rewarded by some small coley, which I cooked for lunch while underway. Tonight's anchorage was Loch Scresort on the island of Rum, which is the biggest, most mountainous and spectacular of the four islands comprising the group known as the Small Isles. We anchored off the ferry pier and dined on board. The next morning we went ashore and walked to Kinlough Castle, an Edwardian mansion built by former owners of the island. On the way we met an energetic Robert and Rose Michael, who had hired bicycles to explore the island. Sadly we found the castle closed and in a state of some decay, with warning signs of falling glass. The ostentatious Kinlough Castle was built as a fantasy home by a super rich industrialist and contains a working orchestration, one of only six that were ever made. In its time, this epic example of upper-class Edwardian eccentricity, contrasts sharply with the present day, where neglect, decay and recessionary times are taking such a toll here on Rum. In the nearby coffee shop, we failed to get a coffee at 11.30. It appears that coffee is served around noon when the daily ferry arrives. From here we inched our way at low-water into the wild and dramatic anchorage of Loch Scavaig, under the Black Cuillins, on the south coast of Skye. We explored ashore looking down on the spectacular Loch Coruisk on a beautiful afternoon. Cruising seldom gets better than this. In the evening we moved the short distance to Soay Harbour for a more restful night, as Loch Scavaig can produce dangerous downdraughts.

On Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> June we weighted anchor and motored in misty, miserable conditions to Loch Harport, on the west coast of Skye where we picked up one of the Talisker Distillery visitor moorings, off the village of Carbost. This is the only distillery on Skye, built in 1830, so a check on its product was deemed necessary. The following day was again miserable as



### Isle of Rum

John Ahern, Robert Michael  
Rose Michael, Vincent Dromey



we headed up the west coast of Skye, but was much improved as we picked up a visitors mooring in Loch Dunvegan. Nearby Dunvegan Castle has been the home of the chiefs of MacLeod for nearly 800 years. Ashore we were served an excellent meal in the very professionally run, Old Schoolhouse Restaurant, before enjoying a nightcap in the Dunvegan Hotel.

With mixed weather forecast for the next few days and a crew change looming in Mallaig, it was thought prudent to get around the top of Skye. We decided on the small marina in Kyleakin on Skye, which would be sheltered from the forecasted southerly winds. All went well until we came out through Caol Sound. This is the sound between the islands of Rona and Raasay that takes you into the Inner Sound, from where we would lay a course to our destination. We were approached by a protection vessel and instructed that due to a submarine exercise in the Inner Sound, we must stay close to the east Raasay shore until we were contacted again. This change of course resulted in us now beating into a fresh southerly wind, instead of being closed hauled on our desired southeasterly course to Kyleakin. No sooner had we received the all clear to proceed directly to Kyleakin, than the wind backed and we still had the wind on the nose. We were none too pleased with their submarine war games. Arriving in Kyleakin at 19.50, having clocked up 55 miles, we went aground briefly while trying to get into an inside berth, in a very congested small marina. The 2.5 metre depth indicated in the pilot is no longer the case. Since the construction of the Skye Road-bridge and bypass, this harbour which was the Skye ferry port and gateway to the island has become a more tranquil place. It now depends more than ever on the business generated from an increasing number of visiting yachts. Especially in southerly winds, it is a far better option than the Kyle of Lochalsh on the other side of Kyle Akin. The O'Reilly's *Wild Again* was also berthed here, and a relaxing couple of days were spent while waiting for better weather.



Marie Claire anchored  
in Loch Scavaig

Isle of Skye



Vincent, Seán & John  
ashore at Loch  
Scavaig overlooking  
Loch Curisk

Isle of Skye

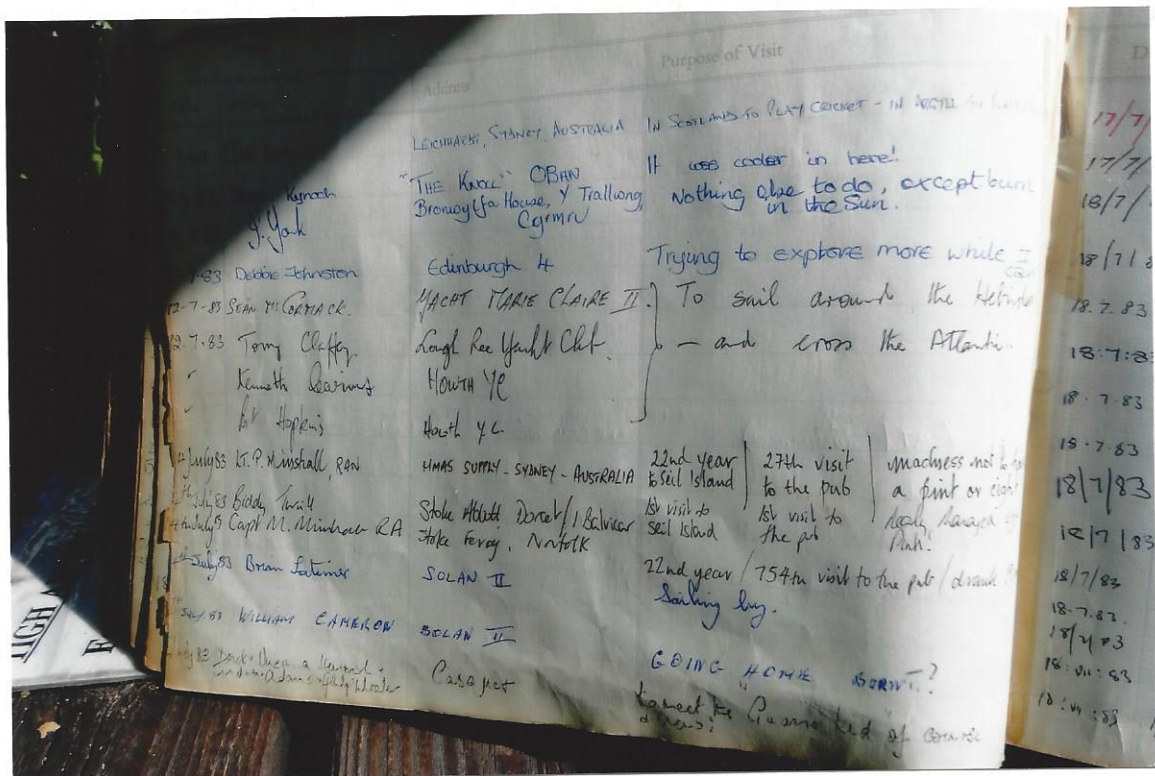
On Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July we departed Kyleakin at lunchtime in company with *Wild Again*, to make our way south through Kyle Rhea and the Sound of Sleat, to our crew change port of Mallaig. We encountered head winds as expected in Kyle Rhea and surprisingly just two knots of favourable tide. We beat most of the way to Mallaig, where we had pre-booked a berth in this fairly new, small and very convenient marina where John O'Reilly was waiting to take our lines. Mallaig is a busy fishing and handy crew change port, with a train service direct from Glasgow. John, Vincent and I had planned to eat ashore as this was their last night on board, but due to heavy rain this idea was dropped and a meal on board was put together from very limited supplies. John and Vincent left for Dublin on Wednesday morning 3<sup>rd</sup> July, while the new crew of Con Moran and Vivienne Cahill arrived that evening, delighted with their very scenic train journey from Glasgow. I was receiving reports from home of beautiful summer weather, but it was rather slow in moving north to Scotland. In fact strong winds forced us to stay a fourth night in Mallaig. We were all looking forward to this new weather system finally reaching Scotland. However Vivienne appeared very happy to stay watching tennis on TV.

On Friday 5<sup>th</sup> July with more southerly winds forecast, we decided in the afternoon after the wind eased a bit, to seek a change of scenery. We picked up a visitors mooring in the very sheltered Dun Ban Bay, otherwise known as Doune Bay, which is four miles north of Mallaig on the east side of the Sound of Sleat. We had the place to ourselves except for two small fishing trawlers. The following day was wet and miserable with the wind still in the south, so any chance of getting south today was out. We were still getting reports of fine settled weather to the south of us, so perhaps tomorrow will bring us the expected improvement. The following morning brought welcome sunshine but no wind. We set a course under motor for Ardnamurchan Point and then to Tobermory, which looked splendid in the newly arrived



Clachan Bridge  
(Bridge over the Atlantic)

Isle of Seil



The record of Marie Claire's  
visit to Tigh-an-Truish  
thirty years ago

2013 summer weather. The next day, having made full use of the facilities of this port, we motored down the Sound of Mull to Dunstaffnage Marina. It is a number of years since I was here last and I was surprised at the increased number of yachts on moorings, while there were a lot of vacant marina berths. A pre dinner drink in the cockpit, while viewing the surrounding landscape and nautical activity, was the perfect cocktail to erase memories of the earlier unsettled weather. After dinner on board we enjoyed a couple of drinks sitting outside the marina bar in the late evening sun.

The morning of 9<sup>th</sup> July saw us passing Oban in Kerrera Sound, as we made our way to one of my favourite anchorages, the very popular Puilladobhrain. No visit here would be complete without a ramble over the hill to Clachan Bridge (“Bridge over the Atlantic”) and a thirst killing pint in the famous Tigh-an-Truish Inn. We signed the “Visiting Yachts Book” on the very last page, just below the Michael’s *Mystique of Malahide* entry. This book contains the history of visiting yachts going back over thirty years. The skipper was able to show Con and Vivienne where *Marie Claire*’s previous visits in 1983, 1993, 2000 and 2010 were recorded. Other Howth yachts that visited over the years are also recorded and I presume a new book will be available soon. We enjoyed a fine meal here on a glorious evening.

The next day we made a lunch time stop at Easdale on our way to Craobh Marina. This former slate quarry has been flooded and transformed into a very popular tourist attraction.

The former workers cottages are now attractive holiday homes, while a Folk Museum, together with shops, post office, restaurants and pub surround an attractive square overlooking Easdale Sound. After lunch on board and with the fine settled weather, the now very relaxed skipper failed to work out the tides for the very tidal Cuan Sound, resulting in a



The square,  
Esisdale



Iona Abbey  
Isle of Iona

very slow and embarrassing passage through, with an adverse tide of at least five knots at times. Don't try it! A chastened skipper arrived safely into Craobh Marina, where we dined on board before enjoying two drinks in the marina bar.

The next morning 11<sup>th</sup> July, we came in through the Dorus Mor and up Loch Craignish to Ardfern marina. For the past week we had a troublesome leak from the water pump and I phoned the workshop in the marina and they agreed to order and fit a new shaft seal. This they did quickly and efficiently. In the evening we moved down the loch to the anchorage of Eilean nan Gabhar (Goat Island). We enjoyed a very peaceful night here, with just the sound of birds for company and not a goat in sight.

The next morning as we headed west for the southwest corner of Mull, after passing out through the Dorus Mor, we set a course for the infamous whirlpool known as the Gulf of Corryvreckan, so as to arrive at slack water. During this passage, the earlier light fog became very dense and as we approached the Gulf, we got a call on the radio from a yacht behind us that had picked us up on radar, to confirm our intentions. Fortunately the fog lifted a bit just before we went through and apart from a few whirlpools it was quite tranquil. We arrived into the attractive and protected anchorage of Ardalanish, on the west side of Ru Ardalanish, the most southerly point of the Ross of Mull. Here we had the company of three other yachts for the night, in blissful isolation. Over the next two days we made calls to Iona and Tinker's Hole. A desire to visit Fingal's Cave on Staffa had to be dropped due to a fresh wind. On arrival into Tinker's Hole in mid afternoon, we were very surprised to find not a single yacht, but three others came in later. Perhaps because of the settled weather, the nearby anchorages of Ardalanish and David Balfour's Bay, where six yachts in total were at anchor, were proving popular.



Yes enough product in stock to see us home!



I had never been into Loch Tarbert on Jura, a favourite with many local sailors, which the Pilot describes as the most remote loch south of Ardnamurchan. A desire to visit on previous cruises was thwarted by unsuitable weather. So it was that on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July we found ourselves at the entrance trying to find the leading marks, which are the key to safe navigation in the three lochs that comprise Loch Tarbert. How did we manage before GPS and chart plotters! It was low water as we made our cautious approach on the leading lines and even so, a lot of rocks were very close. We got safely into the anchorage at Cumhann Mor, which is the narrows between the outer and inner lochs. This is a wild loch in a spectacular setting, but only suitable in settled weather. However, seclusion is usually guaranteed and the prospect of stunning sunsets and if you are lucky, perhaps seeing the deer come down to the water's edge in the evening. We were the only boat here until late evening, when a small Northern Ireland boat joined us. The next morning we availed of the favourable tide in the Sound of Islay, to make a lunchtime stop in Port Askaig, before going on to Craighouse on Jura for the night. We enjoyed an evening drink in the local hotel bar in the shadow of the Jura Distillery.

The following morning we headed up Loch Sween, to a lunchtime stop in the very pretty Fairy Isles, a new anchorage for *Marie Claire*, where having the place to ourselves, we tied up to the only mooring buoy. We later moved around the corner to the popular anchorage of Tayvallich, where we availed of the last free visitors mooring. A pleasant few hours were spent ashore, including a call to the popular watering hole, Tayvallich Inn. Dinner this evening was enjoyed on board. We were now seriously on our way home and next day found us at our final Scottish anchorage, the lovely Island of Gighia, where we anchored as all the visitor moorings were taken. Ashore we discovered that the late Mr McSporrans' shop had

closed last December, frustrating our plans to buy some provisions and a can of diesel. However the cafe on the pier kindly provided us with a few basic items. We dined well ashore in the Gighia Hotel, well known to sailing folk over the years. Also in the hotel we met Derek and Vivienne White from yacht *Ballyclare* and a most convivial evening ensued, with a final night nightcap on their Fastnet 34. Derek very kindly offered us a ten litre container of diesel, as I suspected we might have to motor all the way to Howth.

Away the next morning motoring at 10.50 to avail of the tide and we made better progress than expected, to arrive into Brown's Bay, Larne, at 18.55. A local fog as we arrived was so dense that it was only as the anchor went down, that we saw land to the east. Thirty minutes later we could see all the headlands to the north as far as Fair Head. A very early start the next morning, Friday 19<sup>th</sup> July, got us into Bangor Marina at 07.30. Away again at 14.00 on passage to the very convenient Ardglass Marina and from where the next morning we did the final leg to Howth. As we tied up *Marie Claire*, adorned with a bunch of heather from north of Ardnamurchan, the skipper and crew were well pleased with themselves.

### Conclusions

This year's cruise could be described as a cruise of two halves. The first part was sailed in typical Scottish weather, cool, some strong winds and rather wet and miserable at times. With the exception of the first three days of the second part of the cruise, we enjoyed warm settled summer weather. This was the weather system that Ireland enjoyed for a few days, before it reached us in Scotland. The Western Isles looked magnificent in these conditions and was just reward for all the work and expense involved in owning and running a yacht. This good weather resulted in little wind for periods and consequently a lot of engine use, but nobody

was complaining. *Marie Claire*, a Beneteau First 30 of early eighties vintage, did us proud yet again.

Duration of cruise 36 days

Total mileage 753

Anchorage/ports visited 34

New to *Marie Claire* 7