

Celtic Cruise in Company May 8th - June 1st 2019

by Chris Jones - "Contessina"



This Cruise was a joint venture between the Royal Welsh Yacht Club and the Ocean Cruising Club and incorporated a 460nm round trip from Wales, visiting the Isle of Man, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Eight boats participated, Simo, Ocean Hobo, Contessina, Blue Note II and Blue Bat from The RWYC and

Toodle-oo, Manana and Samsara from the OCC.

The Cruise started with a reception at the Royal Welsh on May 8th followed by a sail past the Club in honour of Club President, Margaret Crozier, and long standing member of the OCC, Lady Denise Evans.

Light winds resulted in a slow start, with boats progressing only as far as Rhoscolyn and Holyhead.



The following day Blue Note II provided pilotage for the smaller boats, Blue Bat, Simo and Contessina, into the inner lagoon on the Skerries where a peaceful night was spent in a spectacular setting with the boats securely rafted up on the big ship buoy.



The next day the fleet made its way north to the Isle of Man with Ocean Hobo and Blue Bat anchoring in Port Elin while Simo, Contessina and Blue Note II carried on to Peel.



interesting especially with strong tides and light winds, when working the tides makes so much difference. Blue Bat had some engine issues and wisely stayed put while Toodle-oo cracked on to the north of Gigha. Blue Note II and Simo did some rock hunting on the south side of Gigha and Contessina and Ocean Hobo avoided a foul tide by anchoring in Machrihanish bay ten miles north of the Mull.

Winds remained light on the passage north to Bangor marina Northern Ireland where Peter Ronaldson and Micheal McKee organized a splendid and informative reception at the historic Royal Ulster YC. The passage around the Mull is always



The weather remained fine for a glorious sail up the sound of Jura to Craobh Haven marina where the fleet were invited to a Scottish Open House barbecue at the home of current OCC commodore Simon Currin and his wife Sally.

Bob Shepton gave a fascinating presentation of his 14 years sailing in Greenland waters and, as further entertainment, Simon had arranged for a rib ride to explore the Gulf of Corryvreckan. This encompassed a salutary experience for intrepid sailors who like playing with tides, an interesting academic study of water flow in confined spaces and some great eagle watching.



The next appointment was on May 25th in Port Ellen, an apt combination of whisky tasting and Ian's birthday - an event not to be missed.



In the meantime the fleet split with some heading off around Mull while Ocean Hobo, Contessina, Simo, Blue Note and Splinter's Apprentice OCC headed through Cuan Sound to the delightfully sheltered Puilladobhrain anchorage south of Oban. Here Simo and Splinters headed north to Oban while Blue Note, Ocean Hobo and Contessina sailed south to anchor in Loch Tarbert on Jura. The weather remained light but fair for the fast run down the Sound of Islay followed by a frustrating fight against a rising tide and falling winds along the south coast to Port Ellen where a comfortable marina berth and plenty of fine whisky awaited. Happily Blue Bat had sorted out their engine problems and, with the youngest crew in the fleet, had made their way north in challenging conditions to join the celebrations. At this stage the weather deteriorated into the seasonal norm of southerly winds and rain, but fortunately the boats were secure and the only hazards were to be found on the stumbling walk in the rain back from the Laphroaig and Lagavulin distilleries.

*Paps of Jura*

Later that afternoon a cheer went up when Dave arrived after a challenging single handed sail down from Oban in much less than perfect conditions - an admirable effort.

The Celtic Cruise effectively finished at this point. Several boats were heading on north to the Shetlands and the Baltic via the Caledonian canal while the rest of us headed home, Simo and Blue Note via the Isle of Man for the TT and

others, like Contessina and Blue Bat, to marinas in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively while crews travelled home leaving the boats for collection at a later date. All in all the event proved to be a very successful combination of free sailing and social occasions involving boats, both large and small, where crews, with varying levels of expertise and local knowledge, could come together in a mutually supportive group - truly, Celtic Cruising in Good Company.