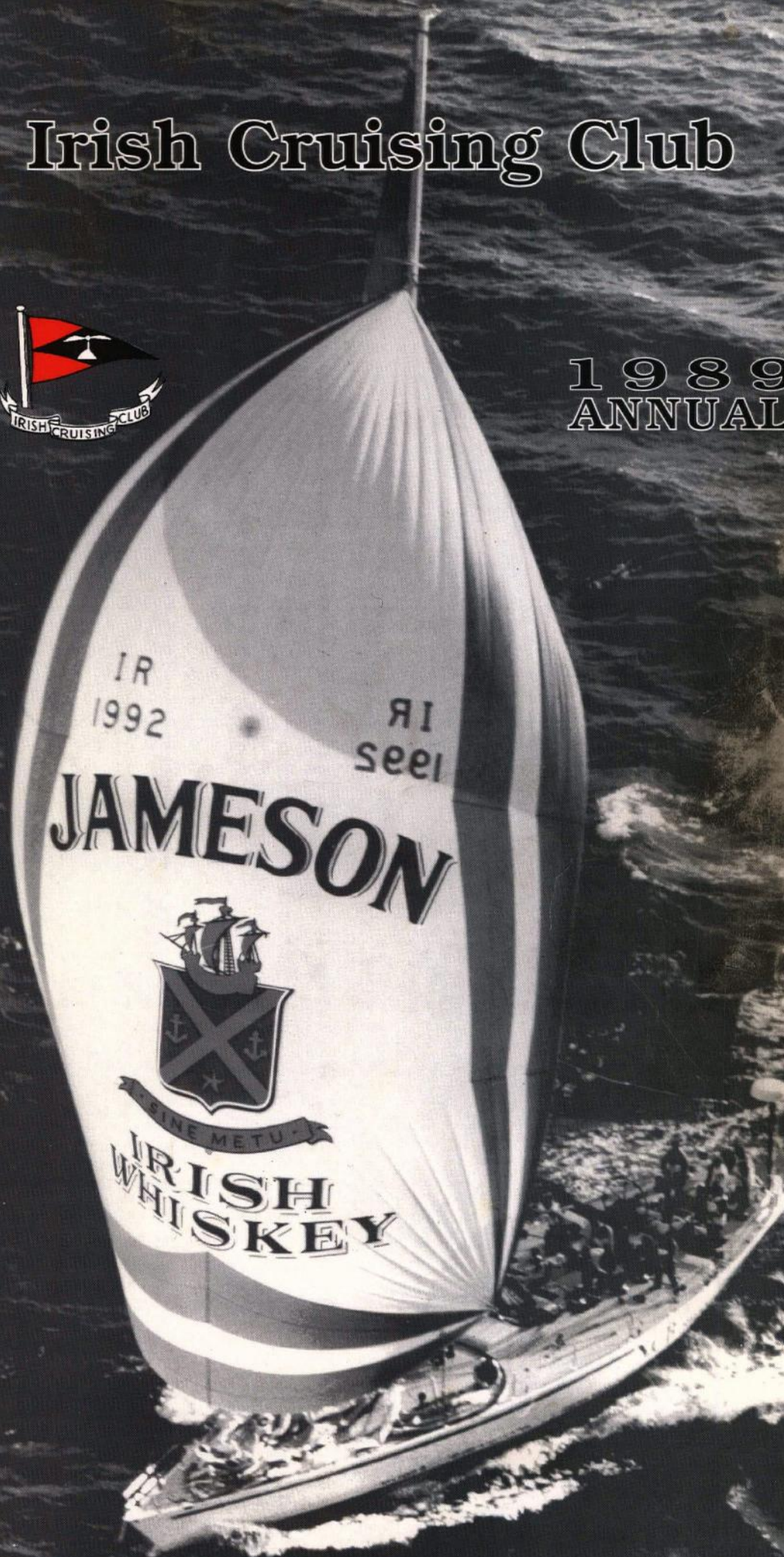


Irish Cruising Club

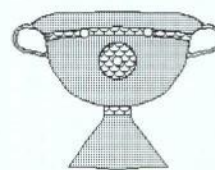


1989
ANNUAL



Mazara to the 'Outer' of the 'Outer Hebrides'

Roderick Monson



The Wybrant Cup

It never ceases to amaze me how easy it is to leave Strangford, with a fair tide and a free sheet, and sail directly to the Hebrides. But this, of course, is in January or February, when we start planning our 'Summer Cruise'.

By Friday July 7, our departure date, the wind is in the North, and the only sensible thing to do is to slip our moorings at Whiterock, and sail to Ballyhenry Bay, and have a good nights sleep. No complaints from the crew. - Ross, age 8; Sue, age 6 and; Valerie, Mum.

On Saturday 8th We put reef in main and set No 2. headsail: Lifted hook 0830. 'morale good', although Ross was not quite himself? We carried the tide out of Strangford. Wind N.W.S., a slow wet beat inside

Butter Pladdy and South Rock, and as we rounded the North Rock there were choppy seas and plenty of spray flying. By the Plough Buoy we had had enough of this ungentlemanly sailing, so we free'd the sheets and sailed into Portavogie, much to the delight of Ross, his idea of a good harbour is plenty of fishing boats. Arrived 1330., glad to be in sheltered water. We spent the rest of the day exploring Portavogie Beach? - to the North of the Harbour, and then had an early night, in anticipation of the morrow!

At 0745 left Portavogie, Wind N.3-4. Motorsailed. Off Ballywalter, Ross was 'seasick' - very strange - we don't often have this problem, so off Donaghadee, with a foul tide and rotten conditions, as well as one very miserable little boy, we decided to put into the Harbour, and lay between the 'old and the new Gaffers', Frank Smiths *Speedwell* and Davy Steadmans *Dolphin*.

Valerie was worried about Ross - but after a sleep and a huge feed the little fellow was ready to go again - thank heavens - so at 1515 we left Donaghadee: Wind decreased N.2., and we motored to Larne and lay alongside *Bamba* (Carrick), at the Ferry Pier. Went ashore to stretch little legs and then back to Mazara - tomorrow 'Gigha'.

Senior members of the crew underway on Monday 10th 0530. Rain - Wind S.W.2. By 0700 wind had died altogether, Engine on. By 1100 the wind had filled in from the S.W., conditions still



Fladda Light.

V. Monson

damp and misty, but by this time the rest of the crew were in full swing and looking for goodies and surprises which had been hidden all over the boat before the cruise began. Shrieks of excitement could be heard coming from the depths of the cabin, and all appeared to be well so far. Goose-winged to Gigha, arriving Ardminish Bay 1630, to find approximately 30 boats - including *Timella* ICC. We now felt that our holiday had really begun. Made a quick dash ashore for some fresh milk and had a very pleasant dinner on board. Later we were invited on board *Kermit*, where Sue whipped the boys at Dominoes - much to their displeasure.

Another early start on the 11th - Left Ardminish at 0530 in company with a German Yacht and guess what? 'Sunshine' and a light westerly breeze - this is the life' by 0600 we had to start the engine - which complained bitterly - and everyone held their breaths we had to motor-sail to carry the tide past the Mac Cormaig Isles, but it didn't really matter, it was a beautiful morning and the scenery was superb.

Wind increased and we were eventually able to get the engine off. Wind S.W. 3-4. Passed Dorus More and Corryreckan and made Fladda Light at 1130 - Suberb sail across Firth of Lorne wind increasing 4-5. Abeam Duart Castle hardened sheets and sailed close hauled to West of Cray Island; off Lough Aline the wind headed and increased. Engine on and reefed main - rain

squalls and choppy seas until we passed Green Isle and were able to ease the sheets and have a fast but very wet sail to Tobermorey— as beautiful and welcoming as ever (It's good to see the children recognise places now - Ross was just 1 year and 9 months when he first visited Tobermorey - and Sue was 'on the way'). At 1950 we anchored in 4 fathoms inside the permanent moorings and hurried ashore, in full oily's. Enjoyed very pleasant meal in 'The Gannet' Restaurant, and coming out were greeted by the Skipper and crew of *Dingo* BYC— We had spent the winter fitting out alongside each other in BYC Boatyard - and Ross was delighted to find James - age 9, and a friend for Sue. Very pleasant evening spent on board *Dingo*.

On Wednesday we spent the morning being typical tourists: Showers, souvenirs, coffee and sticky buns etc: and left Tobermorey at 1600. Sailed over to Loch Drumbuy Wind W.3. The dreaded 'Fishing' had begun. Score - Ross 6 Mackerel - Sue 1. Drumbuy at 1700. Pouring out of the heavens!, so we put on our precious 'Boom tent': made a hot meal and spent the evening playing games and doing jig-saws.

On Thursday 13th wind N.W.3. Beat to Ardnamurchan - conditions dull, cold and miserable. Rounded Ardnurchan Light at Noon. Wind N.W.4. Sailed past Muck : Egg: and Point of Sleat to Armidale. This was a new anchorage for *Mazara*.

We lifted one of the Highland and Islands Board Moorings at 1645, alongside - guess who? *Dingo*. This is a very pleasant place (in the right conditions), and the children spent a very enjoyable evening exploring with yet more company.

Underway on Friday. It was a dull grey morning, but we are so familiar with these conditions in the Hebrides that no one was particularly bothered! Sailed North up the Sound of Sleat, past Isle Ornsay At this point, we decided that our original intention of going to The Orkneys was now futile and just decided to go wherever conditions permitted. So we sailed slowly on, our speed increasing as the tide gathered momentum through Kyle Rhea, with, as usual, low mist shrouding the mountain tops. Ross caught a mackerel, just in time for lunch - so Cookie filleted same, and cooked it in white wine, with chopped onion: bacon: tomato and mushrooms, and served it up on slices of hot buttered toast. The wind died completely, so we started the engine and motored to Kyle of Lochalsh and tied up alongside a fishing boat at the Fish Quay. This is one of the childrens favourite places - there is plenty to see and do. So with *Mazara* well secured we all went ashore on a shopping expedition. Fresh milk, bread, goodies and of course: souvenirs. Ross and Skipper took supplies back to *Mazara* where they were given a huge carrier bag filled with 'Squat Lobsters' - strange looking creatures, unfamiliar to us a cross between a small lobster and a king prawn. Nevertheless, highly recommended by the local fishermen. Cooking instructions as for prawns - so we spent the rest of the day lazily shopping; walking, having coffee in the Loch Alsh Hotel, and eventually preparing the Squat Lobsters which turned out to be very prickly and sharp and extremely sore on the fingers - but well worth the effort! they were absolutely scrumptious in a seafood salad. By late evening we found it hard to believe that there were no other yachts tied alongside, and it was a beautiful evening. We were also fortunate to see an Otter.

On Saturday at 0500 we know why there were no other yachts alongside. Helicopters started taking off and landing every 15 minutes from the Naval Base, 200 yards away. Breakfast came very early that morning! 0855 we set sail and beat out past the lighthouse. After 2 hours the wind died, engine on and we

motored in flat calm conditions to the E of Crowlin Island. It was after lunch before we were able to get the engine off again, and sailed slowly north for three hours arriving Badachro 1645. On the way into the anchorage, while fishing, the children were swamped with mackerel, the water was alive with them; it's good to know that there is something that will get Sue out of her bunk!

Tidied up and went ashore for a meal in the Badachro Hotel, - not a lot of hospitality!

Underway at 0800 on Sunday. Guess what! no wind - there is never a happy medium, so the decision was made to head out to the Outer Islands and visit Stornaway, it had been 16 years since our last visit. Apart from a 2 hour sail in the middle of the day, we had a very uneventful crossing of the Minch, to the North of the Shiant Islands. One of those warm, bright sunny days with superb visibility, we closed Kebock Head and arrived in Loch Grimshader at 1620. "Skipper actually took his shirt off". Later wet suits went on and Ross and Skipper went for a swim in freezing cold water. After being revived with hot coffee, we all went for a long hike in what could only be described as a very bleak, desolate area of the Outer Hebrides - we were not very impressed with Loch Grimshader. *Dingo* turned up later.

Left Grimshader at 0900 on Monday 17th and motored to Stornaway; it hadn't changed much, but it really is a very dirty harbour. It was good to be back. *Dingo* joined us later. We did all the usual touristy things purchased fresh supplies, and new fishing rods etc., much to Skippers disgust!

We were very fortunate to meet a very interesting chap, from Washington D.C., sailing single handed in a 30 foot Cutter *Nereid of Norfolk*, Stephen Demas; and this gave us the perfect recipe for a party on board *Mazara*, which went on into the wee small hours.

On Tuesday we motored out of Stornaway, having had enough of civilization. No wind, so we motored off looking for new anchorages. Past Loch Shell at 1410 - sighted whale off the port bow. 1530 arrived Loch Brollum, which no one seemed to like so came out again and motored on down the coast to a really fabulous anchorage in behind a small island, 1 mile up the Loch on the North side - Loch Claidh, there was not another human being in sight. Later in the evening we managed to climb part of Crionaig Mountain, the visibility was incredible, approximately 50 miles, we were wishing that we had brought a video camera with us, you couldn't possibly hope to capture such beauty. The Minch was like a 'mill pond'. It made us reflect on a number of occasions when that particular stretch of water had not been so kind! Wednesday 19th We were awakened in the early a.m. to the sound of a high speed motor boat circling *Mazara*! It turned out to be the local Game-keeper, looking for 'Poachers'. We invited him on board for breakfast, which he graciously accepted, and we spent ages listening to his stories, and the problems he was having with the deer, salmon and trout. Reluctantly we left Loch Claidh, and with not a breath of wind all day, motored down past Scalpey and were off Rodel at 1400. Decided we would have a look at the 'Sound of Harris' - and who knows if we could find a way through - we might even go out to 'St Kilda' the next day!

On entering the Sound of Harris at the north east end, the marks were very confusing to say the least! The one that looks like a tower, is a cairn, and the one that looks like a cairn is a tower., but having got that little lot sorted out we motored safely into Leverburgh Pier, where we anchored at low water.

1545. Again, our main aim was to try and find some 'fresh milk', it's amazing how little things can become an obsession.

On reflection, our past experiences sailing with Davy Steadman in *Dolphin*, had given us the confidence needed to sail through this very tricky stretch of water. It appeared that the 'bottom' was always clearly visible, and inclined to give one the 'creeps', but the old Guru himself was never more at home than when the kelp was licking the keel bolts on his beloved *Dolphin*.

At Leverburgh we found a very civilised Store, come restaurant, come tourist Office about 2 miles inland, in an otherwise bleak, desolate spot. But no fresh milk an explanation must be due by now Skipper is allergic to 'Long Life Milk'

At 0530 on Thursday 20th we are back to this early nonsense again! Skipper didn't sleep very well. I wonder why?

For 25 years, 'St Kilda' had been a 'Myth' and an unfulfilled challenge. So, with settled weather forecast and a high barometer, maybe this is the time to go! decisions - decisions! 0530, with good visibility and a fair wind N.E.2., we left Leverburgh Pier to make our way through Leverburgh Channel, taking Volinish Rock to port and Red Rock to Starboard, and out into the Atlantic, through Stronay Channel. Past to the N.E. of Shillay Island at 0730 and set a course for 'St. Kilda', with lots of hot coffee and plenty of anticipation! Ross and Sue were still sound asleep.

(Skipper changed his hat, for one brief moment). i.e., Father was heard to say to mother—"Before we go any further, are you happy? I don't really mind if you want to go back." Talk about 'passing the buck' these are the kind of thoughts one can have when there are children on board.

Rain and mist descended as we motorsailed to keep up a



Valerie, Ross and Sue in Main St., Hirta.

R. Monson

reasonable speed. Wind S.E.2. At 1000 Skipper retired to his bunk and left Valerie to steer a 'true course'. At noon he was awakened by sounds of excitement on deck. A school of Dolphins had been sighted, otherwise there was nothing else to be seen but birds. Curiosity got the better of Valerie and eventually she asked that probing question? "How do you know we are still on course?" The reply came back quite confidently, If you are not sure, just follow the birds! (it appeared that all the birds going West were on the same course as *Mazara*). By 1330 bets were being made as to whether we had missed the islands altogether, and contingency plans thought out for getting back, you could feel the excitement on board as everyone glared into the mist for any sight of land. (It's amazing what can be conjured up in the mind, out of mist and fog!). At 1400 a distinct white cloud appeared, dead ahead. (No one was prepared to commit themselves), there was a deadly silence!, but by 1415 land appeared just on the starboard bow approximately 4 miles off, the



Fulmer and chick on St. Kilda.

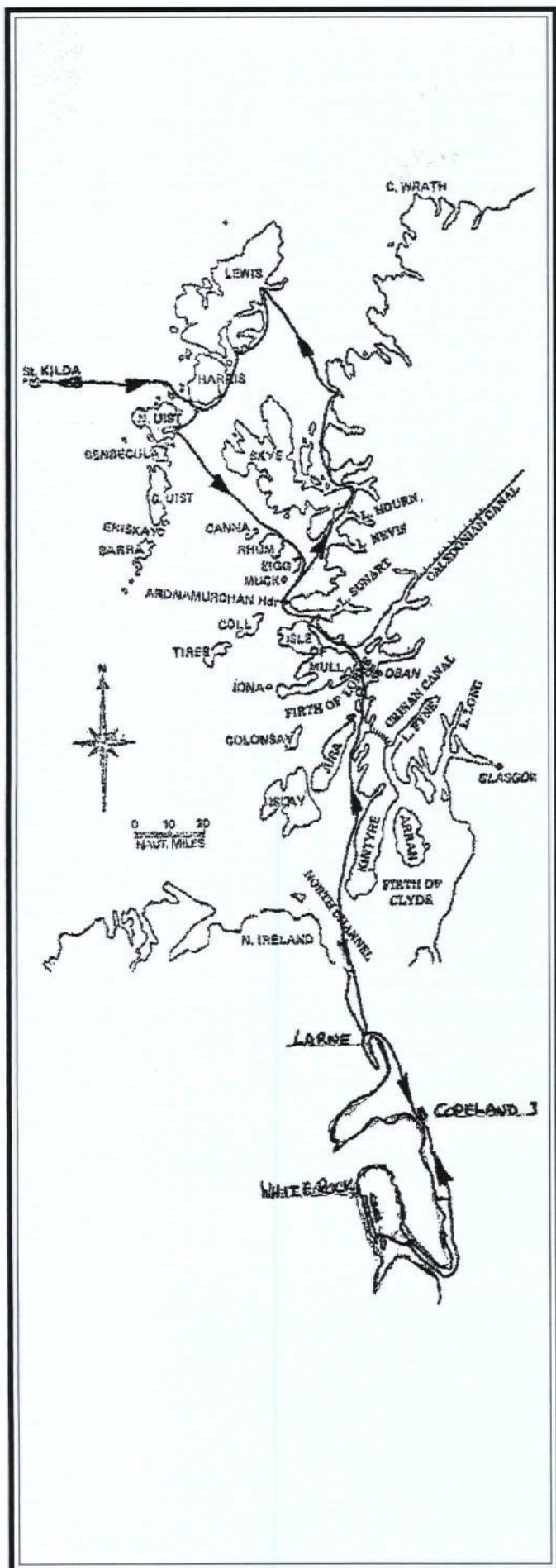
Sue Monson

excitement was terrific. The land turned out to be Boreray and our course (much to Skippers surprise) without alteration would bring us into 'Village Bay'. not bad, considering that all navigation had been done by dead reckoning - no 'Rich mans' toys on *Mazara*.

We let go the anchor at 1545 off the pier in Village Bay, in 6 fathoms of crystal clear water, not really believing that we had actually arrived. Words could not describe the scenery before us! we were surrounded on three sides, by rock rising straight up out of the sea, and disappearing into the clouds, it really was quite spectacular. We made our way ashore, to be greeted by the Wardens wife, (as you will probably know, the Island is occupied by the Army), who welcomed us to St Kilda, and gave us leaflets and relevant information. (It was quite strange, she remarked how odd it was to see 'children' on the Island, she could not remember when there had been any there before). We spent about six hours exploring this fascinating place. The bird life was unbelievable, we saw the famous St Kilda wren, fulmers, kittiwakes, skuas, and of course the famous 'Soay sheep, there was just so much to take in and so little time to do it. In the evening the mist cleared and we were able to see the tops of the mountains. After eventually exhausting the children and ourselves we declined an invitation to 'The Puffin' (the local) and returned to *Mazara* at 2200. A slight rumble made the anchorage uncomfortable, so by 0515 we lifted the anchor and headed back to the Sound of Harris, with the hope that we would be able to return to St Kilda again someday. Visibility very poor.

By mid-morning it was raining and visibility was down to a couple of miles. We were once again joined by a school of Dolphins who played around the boat, much to the delight of the children. By 1330 we had a confirmed sighting of Shillay Island visibility 1.5 miles, at best. (creepy). Skipper decided to return through the Sound of Harris the same way he had sailed out. Land marks all appeared, without difficulty, - the only problem being the 'engine', (isn't it always), it appeared to have lost power!, but with a fair tide and little more than steerage way we were abeam of Stumbles Rock Buoy 1530., and in clear water tried the engine in reverse which must have cleared weed from around the propeller, the power improved and we decided to make our way to Loch Maddy.

But, just as we were clearing the Sound of Harris, visibility closed in to 50 yards. The last bearing taken was Renish Island,



just South of Loch Rodel, so we altered course and motored for it. After rounding Renish Island we were confronted with a lot of shouting and banging, which turned out to be another Yacht. It followed us into Loch Rodel. We anchored at the head of Loch Rodel, in beautiful sunshine you just wouldn't believe the weather conditions could change so quickly?. The evening was very pleasant. We went for a long walk and were fortunate enough to be 'in the right place at the right time', or Sue is very good at 'chatting up fishermen', she was given a large bag of crabs nippers, and Ross was given a 'Ling' approx 4lbs in weight, mind you we are not exactly fish-dish lovers, well, Skipper is, but we decided to have a go, so we headed back to *Mazara* with out 'loot' and spent the rest of the evening cooking the nippers. Skipper filleted the Ling - fair to medium result! We were all about to retire, very pleased with ourselves, for a couple of good reasons; when there was a very strange noise outside, in the water. Millions, yes literally millions of mackerel fry, (none of us had ever seen to many in one place at any one time), and then almost immediately following them came the Loch Rodel Massacre! What seemed to be an equally large number of mackerel and blocken, invaded and for about 30 minutes we witnessed 'feeding time'. Nature certainly can be very cruel.

recommended for children, and afterwards went for a walk up to the Golf Course, to return, only to find that our dinghy had been moved, and was wedged, and sinking, under the metal steps, as the tide came in. Disaster was averted with the aid of some very kind lads from a Sail Training Vessel. Poor Ross was very upset, the dinghy and outboard are his 'pride and joy'.

Wind S.E. 4-5 on Tuesday 25th. A hard slog down the Sound of Mull, with reefed main and No. 2. Headsail. Plenty of spray flying, rain showers and squalls and as usual, every time we thought we would get a free sheet, the wind headed us again. It became apparent that the yachts coming from the south were having a good sail but all appeared to be over-canvassed. We considered putting into Loch Aline, but the crew voted to go on to Oban, and hit the 'high spot'. Abeam Lismore light the wind decreased and we were able to free the sheets and have a brisk sail to Oban. Tied up alongside the pontoon. 1630. The rest of the day was spent walking round in the pouring rain. Fish and chips, candy floss and some presents for home. The highlight of Ross's day was a brief visit to the Amusement Arcade.

Wednesday 26th underway 1030 Motored down Kerrera Sound. Wind S.W.1. Once clear of Esdale with a fair tide under us we were able to stop the engine and make a fast passage to Crinan.

We were joined later by *Jeremy Fisher* I.C.C., who was having one of those 'nightmare' cruises where nothing was going right. A walk ashore to inspect the 'Basin' and drinks in the Crinan Hotel. (Very expensive). The following day as we had to wait for the tide, we didn't leave Crinan until 1115. Wind W.3-4. There was a Southerly Gale on the way! Close hauled to the MacCormaig Isles and then eased sheets, and a superb sail into Ardmish Bay; Gigha. Again full of boats waiting to go South.

Friday was our only 'day off'. Southerly Gale forecast. S.5-6 *Dingo* was in Gigha, this meant that the children spent a very happy day, with company, and in fact, only appeared back at 'feeding time'. Saturday was one of those days with an awkward decision! There was no great advantage in leaving early, as the tide would be against us at 'The Mull'. Left in company with four other yachts at 0915., and were off 'The Mull' by 1320 with two hours of ebb tide still to go. We were pushed well to the N.W., which gave us a free sheet down the County Antrim coast, but off

Larne with wind died away, engine on and we motored across Belfast Lough to Copeland Sound. The tide, by now, was against us and the engine seemed to be loosing power, yet again, so we put into Chapel Bay for the night, in company with *Lutanda* I.C.C. Sun 30th Up at 0530 This was to be the 17th and very last time Valerie would lift the anchor. More rain. Wind W.1. Motored south, off Ballywalter wind increased. Engine off and rain cleared by 0800. Off North Rock and cross Strangford Bar with 'Hot dogs and coffee', everyone was starving. Beat up Lough to our moorings with a fair tide, arriving midday.

After such a 'cruise', thanks must go to Messers McGruer & Feltham for designing and building *Mazara* our 30 foot wooden home for the last three weeks.

	Engine Hours	Underway Total Time	Total Miles made good
Whiterock to Ballyhenry		1.30	
Ballyhenry to Portavogie	1.30	5.0	17.0
Portavogie	4.5		
Donaghadee to Larne	4.5	9.0	27.0
Larne to Gigha	4.0	11.0	49.0
Gigha to Tobermorey	7.0	12.30	78.0
Tobermorey to Drumbay	0.0	1.30	5.0
Drumbay to Armidale	4.0	8.15	34.0
Armidale to Kyle of Loch Alsh	0.25	4.30	23.0
Loch Alsh to Badachro	5.10	7.10	31.0
Badachro to Loch Grimshader	8.10	35.0	
L.Grimshader to Stornaway	1.15	1.15	
Stornaway to Loch Claidh	6.0	6.0	23.0
L. Claidh to Leverburgh	5.45	5.45	22.0
Leverburgh to St Kilda	7.10	10.15	51.0
St.Kilda to Loch Rodel	11.10	11.10	55.0
L.Rodel to Loch Eport	3.40	5.40	18.0
L.Eport to Rhum	14.15	14.15	45.0
Rhum to Tobermorey	5.30	6.30	32.0
Tobermorey to Oban	4.50	6.50	24.0
Oban to Crinan	1.15	4.15	24.0
Crinan to Gigha	3.0	5.15	26.0
Gigha to Copelands	6.20	12.50	62.0
Copelands to Whiterock	2.30	6.30	33.0
TOTALS	108 55	166.15	726.0



The Monson family aboard *Mazara*

W.M. Nixon