

New Horizon Sailing – Autumn 2024 Newsletter

Starting at Troon, we sailed through the Inner Hebrides to Oban and Tobermory. The sail north round the Mull of Kintyre saw “champagne sailing”, with winds from the southeast giving broad reaches and flat seas. Later, we spent time in the Outer Hebrides, out of both Tobermory and Stornoway, before heading north around Cape Wrath to Orkney and then onwards to Shetland with a day ashore at Fair Isle on the way.



After a couple of crew changes in Lerwick and exploring Shetland, including to Muckle Flugga (pictured, the most northerly point of the British Isles), we enjoyed an exhilarating beam-reach passage across to Westray before returning to Kirkwall in Orkney. The return to the West Coast was once again via the Caledonian Canal. The transit of the



canal was as much fun as ever, (the photos show the shore team of Colin and Caitlin) but the passage south from Kirkwall via Wick was hard work in strong south westerlies. An upside was that we went into Cromarty Firth as an unplanned overnight stop and were able to get up close and personal to the giant oil rigs parked up for dismantling.

In September, the trips from Tobermory and Oban, and the return south to Troon, gave us time on the west coast of Mull, Iona, the Garvellachs, Oronsay, Jura, Islay, Arran and the Kyles of Bute. The run from Oban to Troon also qualified as “champagne sailing” – this time with north westerlies to help us on our way. The contrast between the barren grandeur of Jura (photo left) and the forests of the Kyles of Bute in the Clyde (photo right) made for an interesting week.



The weather was challenging at times (this is Scotland, after all). Some high winds kept a lot of boats in harbour and meant that we had many glorious anchorages to ourselves. The summer was dry, unlike the persistent rain experienced further south.

As always, it is the guests on board who make the season a success – my sincere thanks to them. The range of skills and backgrounds continues to amaze – the trio in the Loch Scavaig photo later, for example, are research professors but equally we have welcomed doctors, nurses, leaders of industry, civil servants, teachers, architects, farmers, homemakers, builders etc, etc. which makes for some spirited conversations in the cockpit and around the dinner table. The majority of crew were frequent *Stormdancer* sailors, with whom I've shared visits to amazing places over the years, but we also welcomed five new guests (three of whom were brought along by regulars). We also, sadly, had some cancellations by friends who fell ill, and a couple are still quite unwell – so my thoughts are with them for a speedy return to good health.

Some Personal Highlights:

Sailing.

The passage between Shetland and Orkney can be testing, dependent as one is on the combination of wind and tide. The wind would be strong and either South (bad news) or Southeast (good news depending on our routing). We decided to head for Westray at the northwest corner of the Orkney Islands, which gave a heading southwest and put the wind on the beam. The Röst (the huge area of overfalls south of Sumburgh Head) must be avoided so we decided to pass close-in round the rocky south coast of Shetland, before setting course for Westray. On arrival at Westray, in the dark, we toasted a passage which had been not only fast (76 nm in under ten hours) but reasonably comfortable, with only a short period of discomfort when tidal flow changed.

Happy Crew

It's not always possible to reach St Kilda. The weather needs to be helpful, both for the open crossing and for anchoring in Village Bay. Mike had been on board on three previous attempts, each one aborted because of rough seas, so was understandably keen to make it this time, on a long week out of Tobermory. We had a strong crew on board – Mike, Michael, Sue and Peter know *Stormdancer* well – but the weather forecast would require careful planning and some long days.

Around Ardnamurchan Point and first stop Eriskay - a run of more than eighty miles. Then north to Hermetray, just south of the Sound of Harris before a long sail out through the Sound to drop anchor in Village Bay. On the way, we



detoured to sail past Boreray (pictured), with its stacs, and thousands of gannets. We were all delighted to be there but Mike's pleasure, after all the

previous efforts, was a joy. We had time to explore ashore, but with the weather window closing, we needed to clear out and made our return to Tobermory via Taransay and Eriskay.

Reaching St Kilda was the top prize but we also – anchored at Taransay, beautiful in its own right; spotted white sided dolphins, basking sharks and minke; and enjoyed a very spirited final passage from Eriskay to Tobermory in a force 7 on a broad reach with much surfing and an average speed not too far below ten knots.

Exploring Ashore

However, long passages and hard sailing are not everybody's cup of tea and many enjoy a mix of short sails to pleasant (often stunning) anchorages with time spent exploring ashore, or just taking in the view.



One of my favourite anchorages is Loch Scavaig, on the south coast of Skye beneath the dramatic ridge of the Black Cuillins. I hadn't anchored here for a while but during a week in September we had crew on board – Paul, Stuart and Uli – who were as interested in short hops and beautiful anchorages as in long sailing days. The weather was perfect with clear skies and gentle breezes, so we were able to row ashore to take the short walk to the freshwater Loch Coruisk and enjoy the magnificent view (pictured above).



In the same week, we took in five other scenic and remote anchorages within reasonably short sails including Loch Moidart, with its 12th century castle (pictured).

The Kindness of Strangers (or “Every cloud has a silver lining”)

Here are just three examples of situations in which we received help, often from strangers.

- In Lerwick, we needed help to fix a problem with the domestic hot water system (they say, quite rightly, that yachting is “Boat maintenance in nice places”). John and Terry came on board and did a great job but then took time to use their van to help with provisioning, thus saving much walking and bag carrying. Not only that, but at the next crew change, John insisted on coming along on his Sunday off and in his own car to assist with provisioning, and hunting for gas, again – what a star!

- When sailing into Cromarty Firth – a new anchorage, in the dark with some challenging winds – in a radio exchange with the harbour master we explained the intention to find a mooring off the village. Shortly afterwards, a car drove onto the slip and directed its headlights to help us through the entry passage and a moored boat came on the radio to say that there was just one mooring buoy available, where it was in relation to him, and that he was flashing his navigation lights to identify himself. So, not only practical gestures of help but also a display of solidarity in what could have been a stressful situation.
- An ongoing problem this year has been sourcing gas and we managed only by “scavenging” from unlikely sources. In Orkney, Kenny the assistant harbourmaster helped by fetching a cylinder from another island and in Lewis, friends Dave and Sylv used their car to explore possible sources in remote villages, which turned up another cylinder – all helping to avoid the unimaginable scenario of having to survive on salads and cold drinks! (the gas crisis seems to have eased, so hopefully not a problem for next year).

Wildlife Report.

It was great to note the healthy bounce-back in bird populations, with colonies of puffins in the Treshnish Islands, the Shiant Islands and St Kilda seeming to be back to pre-avian flu levels and likewise for gannets at St Kilda and at Noss in Shetland. Less welcome, maybe, are the great skuas – from finding them dead alongside the road in Fair Isle two years ago, this year we had more than twenty above us at one point.



We saw minke whales and basking sharks at the beginning of the season on the West Coast and in the Outer Hebrides, but after that sightings were rare. A friend on Mull explained that poor whale sightings could be explained by low plankton levels later in the summer, which he attributed to the extensive cloud cover. Further north, we had better weather, with much less rain than further south. Dolphins and seals were seen reasonably often including, those Atlantic white-sided dolphins in the Sea of Hebrides.

Stormdancer update

She benefited from a second winter under cover, with mast off in the workshop as we finished work on renewing



her decks – now only the cockpit sole remains to be done which is on the list for this winter.

Other work included extensive rigging checks, a complete professional survey of hull, drive train and all fixtures & fittings. This September, we also welcomed the RYA on board for their annual inspection. As I write, she is in the water in Troon - sails off and inspected, engine serviced, duvets washed, waterproofs cleaned and proofed etc - but about to be lifted out for the usual work on hull, drive train, anchoring gear, sea cocks etc. Mini projects for this winter include a toilet upgrade, re-galvanising of anchor and chain, some new pumps etc, etc.

Plans for 2025

We will start the season at the beginning of April on the Firth of Clyde and then move to Tobermory, using this as a base to explore the Outer Hebrides, Small Isles and the West Coast of Mull and Iona.

At the end of May, we head north along the mainland coast, around Cape Wrath to Stromness (pictured – credit Steve Lake) for our first crew change in Orkney. Stromness has much history associated with the Hudson Bay Company and exploration in Canada and the Arctic. The cobbled main street has a celebrated art gallery, jewellery and craft shops. The ferry from Scrabster arrives here and for those arriving by air, there is a frequent bus service from Kirkwall which takes 25 minutes.



Next stop will be Kirkwall, with a choice of routes, either north along the dramatic west coast of mainland Orkney or via Scapa Flow, with sheltered waters and many possibilities - a walk to the

Old Man of Hoy; a visit to the award-winning Scapa Flow Museum; at anchor in sheltered Longhope or picturesque St Margaret Hope.

Then we head north to Shetland with a possible stop at Fair Isle along the way and hopefully revisiting some favourite anchorages including Mousa, Noss, Lunna Voe, Haroldswick, St Ninians (pictured – credit Kate McKean), Papa Stour – all with the prospect of great walks on shore. Our visit is timed to avoid the yachts who join the Bergen to Lerwick race, but we still expect to see many Scandinavians, reminding us that Lerwick is closer to Bergen than it is to Edinburgh.

Time to head south – via Orkney, Cape Wrath and the Minch (unless weather dictates that we take the Caledonian Canal), to Tobermory and then a few more weeks around Mull, the Small Isles and Skye before our return to the Firth of Clyde.

The season is book-ended with RYA Training Courses.



I very much hope that you find something of interest in the programme (shown below) and that we'll meet up on board again.

with Best Wishes

Richard

+44 7770 303613

richard@newhorizonsailing.com

			2025 Programme		
Cruise No.	Dates	Nights	Type	Start/Finish	Price pp (before discounts)
1	April 05-11	6	RYA Coastal Skipper and Competent Crew	Troon	£1,190
2	April 13-19	6	Inner Hebrides Explorer	Troon/ Tobermory	£1,390
3	April 21-30	9	West Coast Explorer	Tobermory	£1,990
4	May 03-10	7	Mull, Small Isles and Outer Hebrides	Tobermory	£1,590
5	May 13-19	6	Mull and Small Isles	Tobermory	£1,390
6	May 22- 29	7	Mull, Small Isles and Outer Hebrides	Tobermory	£1,590
7	June 01- 09	8	West Coast and Orkney	Tobermory/ Stromness	£1,790
8	June11-16	5	Orkney Explorer	Stromness/ Kirkwall	£1,190
9	June 19- 24	5	Orkney Explorer	Kirkwall	£1,190
10	June 27- July 02	5	Orkney Explorer	Kirkwall	£1,190
11	July 05-12	7	Orkney and Shetland	Kirkwall/ Lerwick	£1,590
12	July 15-21	6	Shetland Explorer	Lerwick	£1,390
13	July 23-30	7	Shetland and Orkney	Lerwick/ Kirkwall	£1,590
14	August 02-10	8	Orkney and West Coast	Kirkwall/ Tobermory	£1,790
15	August 14- 26	12	My family holiday	Tobermory	
16	August 29- Sept 04	6	Small Isles	Tobermory	£1,390
17	September 06- 12	6	Mull and Iona	Tobermory/ Oban	£1,390
18	September 15- 22	7	Inner Hebrides and Firth of Clyde	Oban/ Troon	£1,390
19	September 24- 30	6	RYA Coastal Skipper and Competent Crew	Troon	£1,190