

Dinghy Cruising with Dad

by Archie Watts

We had a long drive north from Pembrokeshire in Dad's old Land Rover towing our Lune Whammel, Harmony. It was really full of kit as we had to drop off my older brother and his mate in Oban so that they could go on some sort of survival course. The weather was dreadful all the way up but there seemed to be plenty of wind. Unfortunately, this dropped just after we launched at a marina behind the island of Shuna!

This was the first time that Dad and I had sailed together without the rest of the family and also the first time that I had spent more than one night at a time on Harmony.

I couldn't believe the amount of kit we had to load on board her: tent, sleeping bags and mats, spare clothes, stove, water, fuel, all the normal boat safety stuff and loads and loads of food.



Dad explained that where we were going there were no shops or cafés unless we were prepared to walk for miles – so we needed a lot of stuff to be able to look after ourselves. Anyway, we launched on a rising tide (with no problems – none of the usual Dad/Mum shouting!) and set off after having our lunch alongside the pontoon. There was no wind, so we motored off into a grey murk heading for a place called Port Ramsay. I couldn't see the castle that Dad said was on the southern end of Shuna and we only caught glimpses of Castle Stalker (the cool French one in Monty Python and the Holy Grail) through the mist. Motoring was really boring, but we eventually crept into Port Ramsay and anchored in a sheltered rocky cove; it wasn't very deep, but we thought it would be OK for us even when the tide went out.

It wasn't much of a port to my mind; there were only a few houses, not even a jetty and (as it turned out) no shop or café. We decided to row ashore and see what we could find and phone Mum at home (no mobile phone signal here!). There seemed to be nobody about when we got ashore (it was raining) but after an annoying time in the phone box (credit cards only – Dad said he had more understanding for vandals now) we reassured Mum that we were alive and well. We decided to see what else we could of the island and walked up the road in the rain. We didn't see much (not even the signposted café) so turned back after a couple of miles and rowed back out to our boat.

Supper was great and we put up the tent and went to bed early. I slept really well until Dad stood on me in the middle of the night. Apparently, the wind had changed and he needed to check the anchor – it was certainly a lot more choppy than when we went to bed. I woke up feeling pretty sick and stayed in my bag while Dad took the tent down. It was much better in the fresh air so I went back to sleep while Dad sorted the boat out. I woke up again to a splash and a cross word: he had dropped his razor overboard! Even though we could see it on the bottom, it was too far down to get it back. As I was feeling better, we decided to get the anchor up and go sailing.

We went out into Loch Linnhe with plenty of wind and a nice sunny day and across towards Loch a Choire. Although we could see Glen Sanda castle we couldn't go where we wanted to because the wind was coming from there. We heaved to, had lunch (really good tinned crab and oatcakes!) and then reached back down past Shuna (still couldn't see the castle), Castle Stalker, Port Appin (wind was too good to stop to go to the café) and round into Loch Creran which has a really exciting winding entrance – like going into a secret harbour. The wind dropped just as we got close to South Shian and as it was so peaceful we decided to row into the anchorage. Dad did the first bit then I finished off. Harmony is really heavy to row! That night it was so clear that we didn't bother with the tent and slept under the stars in our bivvy bags. We woke up to a very heavy dew and the most fantastic view.

Loch Creran



And it went on like that for the rest of the week. We had some fantastic sails and I even had a sort of race with a Drascombe when I was helming on a long beat back down Loch Creran. The weather wasn't very warm most of the time (except when we walked four miles to a phone box one afternoon) and was quite wet sometimes. One night I thought that the tent was going to blow away – but it didn't. I learned that the Coastguard weather forecast was really important! The good thing about being afloat in Scotland is that the midges mostly don't get you. I saw seven castles from the sea (and one from the land), over 30 seals and one porpoise. We even had a fantastic lunch in a pub with its own moorings. I was really sorry when we had to go back to haul Harmony out – which Dad and I did on our own (no shouting necessary either). When can we go back? There's so much that we didn't see or do.