

with beer. I sat on the pub lawn overlooking the creek. There was a hot sun, blue sky and a profusion of wild flowers. Although I carried a small child's dinghy for getting ashore I didn't use it at all on the whole cruise.

Day distance 12.5 n. in. / Total distance 22.1 n. in.

Friday 9 May

It had been a windy night at anchor with the tent acting as a sail. The 0520h inshore waters forecast gave SE F4 falling to F3 with showers. This sounded ideal for the 25-mile journey to the first safe anchorage out on the very west of Mull. Every day began with the forecast, after which I rose and began striking camp and cooking breakfast. I was acutely aware of the absence of an engine on this cruise as the shores are mountainous, rocky and unforgiving. I made a good start by scraping through a narrow, shallow gap over rocks at the southern end of Puilladobhrain anchorage, saving a beat of half a mile up the deep northern exit. I passed to the north of Irish Island and crossed the Firth of Lorne to close the high cliffs and mountains of Mull. It began to rain heavily near Frank Lockwood's Island so I ran on before the wind, dressed in oilskins and sheltered by an umbrella. A small naval vessel and two inshore fishing boats were the only boats I saw all day and they were all a long way away. *Lowly* ran all day along this rugged coast until the wind died at 1500h just short of Ardanish Point. The tide was on the turn so I took to the oars for an hour to enter the remote rocky anchorage of Ardanish. I found that a 'rowing mirror' I had made was very useful for the more prolonged bouts at the oars. This is a small round cycle mirror taped onto a piece of conduit which fits into the gunwhale strip. There was no path or access in or out of the cove. My mobile phone and VHF were silent, out of range. I climbed halfway up a hill to see if the mobile would work but succeeded only in awakening the midge population a month early. I was totally alone, apart from the midges, although a charter yacht came into the next cove later that evening.

Day's distance 25 n.m. / Total distance 47.1 n.m.

Saturday 10 May

In the morning I awoke to strong winds and a sea fog with visibility down to half a mile. The skipper of the yacht, Frank, rowed over as I was about to leave. The coastguard had put out a VHF security to enquire if anyone had seen me. My wife had not realized I would be out of touch by mobile phone and had phoned the coastguard. I had time to kill before the tide turned favourably south of the Sound of Iona so I sailed and rowed between the rocks to beach on white sand at Traith Gheal a mile to the west. When the charter yacht motored past out at sea I gave chase. Even with two reefs in the main, *Lowly* kept pace with her. I would have closed if I knew what I later learned, that a school of dolphins were playing around the yacht. Then followed several hours of arduous exertion. The tide had not yet turned and a F4 wind was funnelling down the Sound. I was on the helm for 3/4 hours beating into wind and a choppy sea. I took in one reef half way through the passage. As I grew more tired I had to force myself to concentrate. At the northern end of Iona I took in a second reef and reached off fast into a cross sea until I was able to turn south into Loch na Lathaich. I came onto a beach on the eastern side and walked in waders and oilskins a mile to a phone box at the village of Bunesan to leave a message for Judith. I was shocked to hear my recorded voice on the answer phone when I got home - I sounded totally exhausted. I then returned to the boat. I sailed a mile west into Loch Caol to anchor in the lee of the low rocky cliff. The phosphorescence sparkled not only in the water but on the anchor rope in its bucket inside the tent. Anchoring was followed by the evening ritual of cooking a huge pasta meal before crashing into sleeping bag oblivion until the 0520h weather forecast.

Day's distance 17n.m. /Total distance 64.1 n. m.

Sunday 11 May

The inshore waters forecast gave light variable winds, and so it proved. I rowed over to a jetty to fill water bottles before setting sail. Six hours later I had tacked and drifted north in hot sunshine and still had not reached Erisgeir Island. My intended destination, the distinct basalt island of Staffa, was tantalizingly close yet getting no closer. I rowed on and off for 2 hours but was still 2 miles away from Staffa and Fingal's Cave when I knew I would have to turn for shelter for the night. I now rowed north for 3 hours, passing west of Little Colonsay and entering Gometra Harbour, a sheltered pool between the islands of Gometra and Ulva. I anchored on the Ulva shore at 2200h just as light started to fade. Another big meal, another exhausted sleep.

Day's, distance 10.3 n. m. / Total distance 74.4 n. m.

Monday 12 May

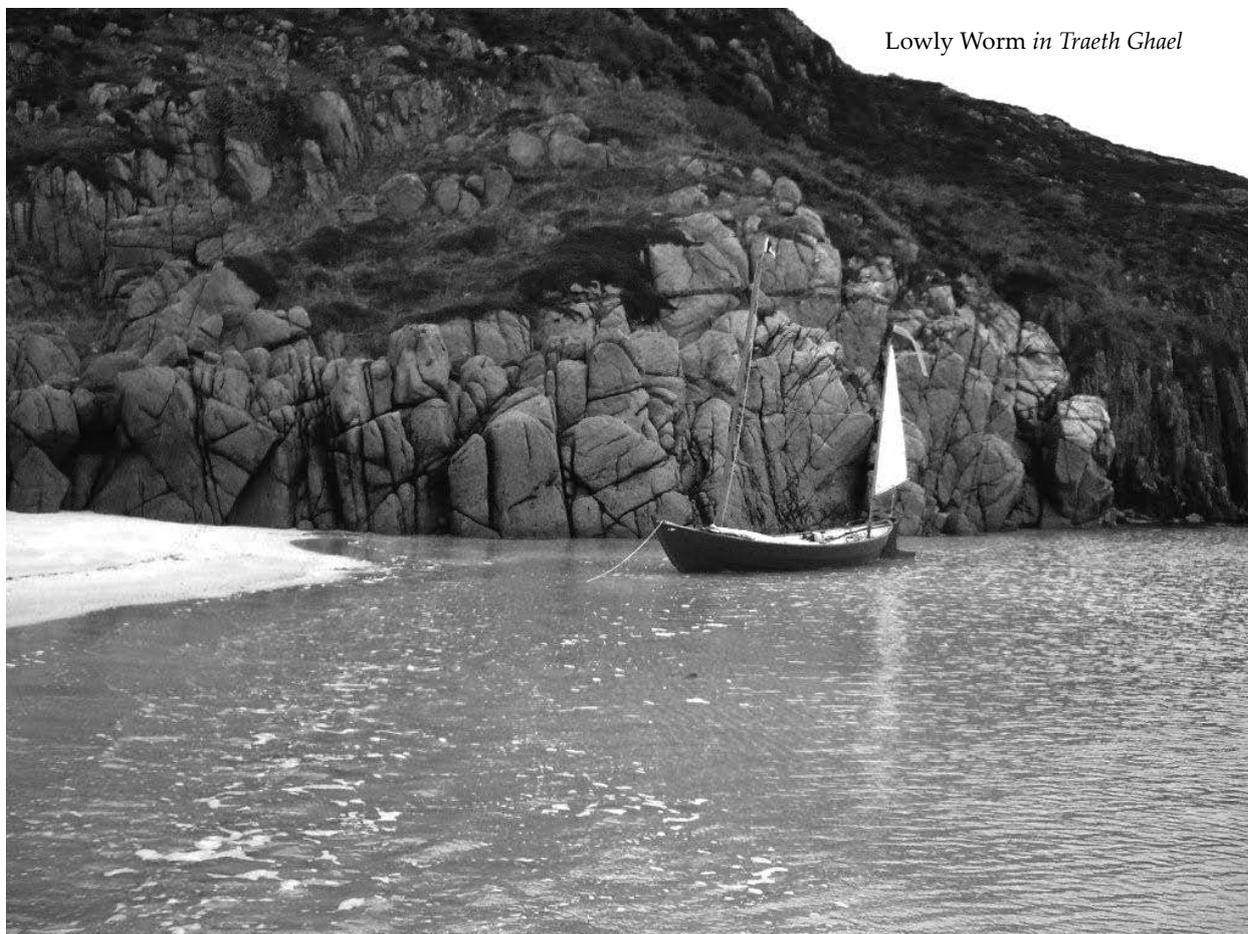
As I cooked breakfast a mountain hare ran by very close on the shore. Its body was summer brown but its legs were still winter white. At 0630h I rowed out south and then west along the south coast of Gometra

inside the rocks and island of Maisgeir. A gentle breeze filled in so I got the sails up and started heading towards Fladda, the most northerly of the Treshnish Isles. The tide was due to turn and flood fast up to Caliach Point, a very useful lift. There was no chance of sailing against the contrary flow. Suddenly a black fin and tail appeared 100 metres ahead. I turned to get the binoculars. When I turned back the basking shark was alongside *Lowly*, just yards from me. With a slight swish it sank and I didn't see it again. The tide picked up near the Treshnish Isles and with a beam wind I crossed Calgary Bay at 6.5 knots. The wind then died but moments later came back from the west and the fast progress continued. I could see the race off Caliach Point long before I got there and headed inshore to escape the fastest choppiest current. It still picked us up, took the wind from the sails, and spewed *Lowly* out on the other side. I then headed off to the NE and Ardmore Point 8 miles away. Having crossed the entrance to Loch a Chumhainn I anchored in behind Quishnish Point at the mouth of Loch Mingary for lunch in warm sunshine and clear calm water. I then sailed again, with the wind dropping off as I passed Glengorm Castle. When it returned it was on the port bow moving straight ahead as I rounded Ardmore Point and turned ESE for the Sound of Mull. Then began another long hard beat via Bloody Bay and Rubha nan Gall lighthouse towards Tobermory. A huge cruise ship the *Marco Polo* passed outward bound, followed by the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry from Oban to the Outer Hebrides. The evening was drawing in as I made my final tack on port right across Tobermory Bay. *Lowly* well heeled and travelling very fast passed through all the moored yachts, rounded up 50 metres upwind of the pontoons and dropped back to come alongside under mizzen alone. I was aware of many eyes watching closely from the cockpits of moored and anchored yachts. 'Good to see you,' said Jim the Harbourmaster, 'I was down here early Saturday looking for a red Ness Yawl after picking up the securité'. One of the prettily painted houses on the harbourside is a Youth Hostel. There I enjoyed a long lingering hot shower before returning to a quayside bar near the boat for supper.

Day's distance 23 n.m. / Total distance 97.4 n.m.

Tuesday 13 May

It was the height of luxury to leave the tent standing and be able to walk on and off the boat at will. I still rose after the shipping forecast and walked around Tobermory as it woke to the new day. A yacht centre being built at the head of the pontoon is almost complete. This will have WCs, showers, water, rubbish disposal, telephones and laundry. Even so, the existing facilities in Tobermory are good and very welcome after the confines of the dinghy. There is a café in a converted church on the harbour side with shaded tables outside,



Lowly Worm in Traeth Ghael

ideal for hanging out and people-watching on a hot sunny day. There are lovely coastal walks both ways from the harbour and I took the beautiful wooded path to the lighthouse. I also visited a quaint museum of Mull's history back at the harbour.

Day's distance 0 n.m. / Total distance 97.4 n.m.

Wednesday 14 May

The tides were all wrong today for sailing down the Sound of Mull and then up the Firth of Lorne. This was especially so as the wind had veered. As wind in these steep-sided waterways tends to blow up and down either one way or another it was now against me blowing up towards Tobermory. However I was keen to go and it was a lovely day. I decided to depart by beating down inside Calve Island in a F3 on the last of the ebb. At the southerly end the channel becomes very narrow and my tacks got shorter and shorter. The exit was very shallow, too shallow to keep the centreboard down. The tide turned and started to gather pace against me quite quickly. I took to the oars and by rowing very hard just managed to creep through against it and pull away. I then started to beat right across the Sound from shore to shore on long tacks. However with the wind on the nose and a contrary tide I wasn't gaining much ground. After an hour of this I anchored close in off the Morvern Shore and got my book out. The wind died. Two or three hours later a gentle breeze began to blow from the north. I began to sail hugging the mainland shore and gained ground nicely in the counter currents of the little bays on that side. As the tide slackened the wind increased over the next few hours and *Lowly* ran faster and faster south passing Salen, Loch Aline and Ardtomish Bay. I rounded Rubha na Ridire into the Lynn of Morvem in the early evening but now again I was against the tide. Reaching across between the high mountains of Morvern on the remote mainland shore, and Lismore Island became tiring as the evening drew in and the ebb tide gained in strength. The sea grew choppier. I pulled in behind Bernera Island to gain shelter for the night. I chose the wrong side! There is no safe harbour all along this side of Lismore until the very top and I hadn't the energy to keep sailing, though the wind was favourable and F3 to 4. I anchored close in to the rocks on the north side of Bemera to escape this wind. I got the tent up and cooked supper. I considered too quickly the fact that the boat was totally exposed if the wind should shift through 180 degrees during the night. I was tired. I decided to risk it. There was no easy alternative. Mistake.

Day's distance 19 n.m. / Total distance 116.4 n.m.



Thursday 15 May

At 0100h I was awakened by a gentle bump. I jumped out of the bag to find that a very gentle breeze from the north had pushed *Lowly* onto the rocks. With the tent up there was no way I could get off, so in tee shirt and pyjama trousers I lowered the tent, hauled the anchor and rowed out into the bay 100 metres or so offshore and re-anchored. I then tidied away the tent, cooking gear, etc. in darkness to ready the boat for sea, got dressed and sat under my sleeping bag half dozing on anchor watch until 0400h and daybreak. The anchor held, the wind had not increased, and daylight made the situation easier. I turned in to sleep until the forecast. I was lucky, I had got away with it. I double-reefed the main and beat out of the Bay and continued beating up the Lismore shore. It was another lovely day as I anchored to cook breakfast off Lismore, whose low cliffs were covered with a profusion of wild flowers. The wind then became variable and died away. I anchored again in a little bay with a waterfall. After an hour or so I began to row, enjoying the lovely island shore. A school of porpoises came snuffling past, the second group I had seen on this trip. I continued rowing in this way in hot sunshine until the wind filled in gently just short of the islands at the top of Lismore so I sailed through the rocks off Port Ramsay to round Lismore. The scene that greeted me was a great surprise. On the island shore a slipway, a sandy beach, children and adults on a beach holiday. On the mainland shore moored boats, a little ferry, holiday homes and a hotel. This looked like France in the summer. The wind bent around the island with me and I continued to reach at 2/3 knots down the east coast of Lismore in the Lynn of Lome. I had an hour and a half in hand to reach Eriska and the entrance to Loch Creran before the tide turned and exited at 3 knots. I arrived in good time, was picked up by the last of the flood and whisked through the beautiful winding entrance and into the Loch. A lovely final sail up to Creran Moorings with mixed feelings, a sense of achievement and anticipation at going home on the one hand, and sadness that this beautiful cruise was ending. At the moorings amongst the several kind offers of tea and assistance was caravan resident and DCA member Brian Swindlehurst. I spent that night in the luxury of Craighdaric Youth Hostel. For sure, I will be back.

Day's distance 12 n.m. / Total distance 128.4 n.m. AG

Alan and Lowly on the slip

